



China and the Creative Idiom: A Study of an Advertising Agency in Beijing

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CHINA AND THE 'CREATIVE' IDIOM:
A STUDY OF AN ADVERTISING AGENCY IN BEIJING

A Dissertation

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CHINA AND THE 'CREATIVE' IDIOM:
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In the last decade, advertising and branding have grown in importance as generators of economic growth for Chinese companies. Additionally, China's leaders have stressed use of *creativity* in developing a modern and competitive society and economy, as stated in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan. This dissertation is an ethnography of Chinese conceptualizations of creativity and its use as understood by employees of an advertising agency. This account is based on fourteen months of fieldwork carried out at GLBJ, a multinational advertising agency in Beijing. Use of creativity and employees' understanding of what is deemed creative is analyzed through formal and informal interviews, a questionnaire, and participant observation in the account planning department of the agency.

Corporate emphasis on the use of creativity in its business operations, and a strong record of success meeting client needs in other countries, grant GLBJ legitimacy as an institution capable of assisting Chinese companies. Yet efforts at satisfying Chinese client requests often hit snags due to differences in the interpretation of creativity by agency and client. GLBJ employees, the majority of whom are Chinese, rely on a western conceptualization of creativity in addressing their work. This conceptualization views creativity as a product of a process where the "new" is the result of a "radical break" from what comes before. Whereas Chinese clients, when expressing an interest in branding, conceptualize its main ingredient,

creativity, as a product and process related to the “new” emerging out of “continuity” with that which came before.

While creativity is viewed by both set of actors as essential in meeting the aims of branding, they differ on its characterizations. These characterizations are rooted in ideological as well as cultural differences, which are permeated with the ongoing influence of socialist values on client actions. Even as Chinese advertising garners praise for modernizing and moving away from a propaganda perspective, criticism persists over what advertising professionals feel is their clients’ “lack” of proper understanding of creativity. What this ethnography illuminates is the contested nature of creativity as a concept in China, and the various factors contributing to this situation.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kimberly Audrey Couvson was born on 26 November 1976 to Doris and Angliee Couvson in Fremont, CA. Kimberly is the youngest of seven children, and the first of her immediate family to achieve a doctorate. Prior to coming to Cornell, Kimberly studied and received a Bachelor of Arts degree (B.A., 1998) in cultural anthropology from the University of Washington, Seattle (1998) and a Masters of Arts degree (A.M., 2002) from Harvard University in China Studies through its Regional Studies East Asia Program. Kimberly's interest in the study of Chinese society and culture began during her time at Washington, where she also competed as a member of Washington's varsity women's track and field team in both hurdle events (100 and 400 meters). She remains an avid runner to this day.

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I consider myself fortunate to have received the amount and degree of funding I did over the years it took me to finish. Funding for the research connected to this dissertation came predominantly from sources at Cornell. The Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies and the East Asia Program provided grants to cover the expense of travel during the formative stages of my work. Language training prior to going to Beijing was supported by two academic year and one summer Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship. Funding for fieldwork in 2004 and in

2005-06 came from the department of Anthropology in the form of a small research grant, and a Sage fellowship from the Graduate School. Two smaller travel grants, one from Anthropology and one from the Society for the Humanities, made it possible for me to return to Beijing in late 2008 for a follow-up study. Upon return from the field, writing of the dissertation was supported for one semester by a Provost Diversity Fellowship, granted through the Graduate School, for two semesters by teaching fellowships in Anthropology, and for one summer through an internship with the Knight Writing Program at Cornell.

An early attempt at formulating my focus in the dissertation was presented at the “East Asia Ethnography Dissertation Workshop,” held at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in 2007. I would like to say thank you to the other workshop participants, students and professors, for their comments on my work and its writing at such an early stage. Completion of the writing of the dissertation took place while holding a position as a visiting researcher at the Center for Development Research (ZEF, Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung) in Bonn, Germany. During this time, I received help with writing from members of the ZEF community through comments associated with presentation of my work in their seminar series on “Culture, Knowledge, and Development”. Staff members and other graduate students at ZEF also helped to shape my thinking by reading and commenting on my chapters while in draft form.

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about the joys associated with doing ethnography, and for keeping me grounded in the details, especially when the theory was throwing me off. All of these things helped to teach me what this process is really all about. Jens Liebe, my partner, was also influential in helping me see the dissertation through to the end. I am forever grateful to him for taking the time to read and critique my chapters, talk to me about my ideas, and about analysis and research in general. Thank you for your love and objectivity, which not only helped buoy me, but also provided an often badly needed sense of perspective. To them both: Thank you for not abandoning me as I struggled and for helping to guide me when I got lost. Thank you also to Eric Henry, for taking the time to read and comment on my writing and letting me know how it could be improved.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B2B	Business-to-Business
CBD	Central Business District
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CAS	Chinese Academy of Sciences
3C	“Computer, Communications, Consumer Electronics”
ECD	Executive Creative Director
GLBJ	Global Local Advertising, Beijing
GCED	Group Executive Creative Director
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
KIP	Knowledge Innovation Plan
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
POP	Point-of-Purchase
R&D	Research and Development
RECD	Regional Executive Creative Director
SOE	State-Owned Enterprise
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WBI	World Bank Institute
WTO	World Trade Organization

PREFACE

GLBJ, the name of the advertising agency used in this study, is a pseudonym. In this dissertation, I utilize the Pinyin system for the Romanization of all Chinese names and words. The names of all the individuals who appear by name in the dissertation have been changed out of a respect to protect their identities and in accordance to the stipulations of that non-disclosure agreement (NDA) signed with GLBJ..

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

“Creative Day”

Entering the large meeting room usually used for company celebrations, it is immediately clear that today’s event is of interest to many people. All of the chairs which have been set up in neat rows in the center of the room are occupied, and for those attendees unable to find a seat, lining up against the wall works just as well. It is a little past one-thirty in the afternoon when I arrive, and presentations have already started. I have not missed much, just a brief video entitled “The Best of the West” that showed award-winning advertisements from the United States and Western Europe. The video’s showing helps to set the tone of today’s gathering, which flyers posted around the office described as a “dialogue” on the future of brands and branding in China.

At the front of the room is a podium where the regional executive creative director (RECD) for Global Local’s Asia Pacific’s operations stands. He has flown in from Singapore specifically for this event. His purpose for being here, he explains, is to explain to the Beijing office staff and its invited guests why the use of creativity in their product is important. What he has to say is exacting. Using the video as a prompt, the RECD explains that although “not much difference” exists between the sort of ads just shown and those produced in Asia, one key difference that *does* exist is in their creativity. “As we can see, very few are from China...Taiwan...” mainly because they “lack creativity...voice, authenticity, and authority...issues that are constantly resurfacing” but going unaddressed. Joining in this critique are the voices of two other invited speakers, both also “foreign” experts in the advertising field.

Representing his own graphic design firm, the second speaker, a white, New Zealander, explicates the idea of creativity that is on center stage in order to illustrate the event's broader focus. Noting China's current reputation of being non-innovative, he explains that "creativity is not the infringement of copyrights or theft of intellectual property, but the recognition and drawing out of one's own innate abilities to create." For in his opinion, clearly too many people in China do not understand these distinctions, and learning to realize what they are will only help the Chinese know creativity when they see it. Yet it is the third speaker, Global Local, Beijing's own executive creative director (ECD), whose words express the most criticism. Drawing on his vast experience working in advertising markets around the world, this England-born, white, individual, states what clearly amounts to his distaste and frustration with Chinese ads. Viewing such objects as unoriginal, "in Chinese ads, people are always the happy...pretty...the type (of model)...the face, always the same," he implores his listeners to make a change. Stating what he believes to be the basic principles required for bringing about creativity, he calls out a list populated with ideas—"type," "consistency," "surprise," and "simplicity," with the point being that creativity is only possible when the things that give it tangibility are known.

Introducing the ethnography

The above account is an excerpt from an anthropological encounter I had not long after beginning fieldwork at a multinational advertising agency in Beijing. The excerpt describes an event labeled "Creative Day" by the agency that took place in early September 2005. This description highlights the main themes examined in this dissertation, and the perspective from which they are known, as it is a hallmark of ethnography to draw attention to the main characters who inform our analyses.

Specifically, this description identifies creativity, branding, and professional expertise as key issues associated with the study of Chinese culture in the early 21st century.

Set in the confines of a corporate meeting space, this description focuses on its occupants—the curious, but silent Chinese audience, and vocal foreign speakers. I highlight the positioning of these two groups vis-à-vis one another to illustrate what I argue is an unequal structural relationship based on knowledge and the origin of that knowledge. In an era when nations strive for standing according to the strength of their cultures' reach, what comes to define that strength is the extent to which a nation and its society is creative. When we think of creative nations, inevitably what comes to mind is the image of a place that is geographically western, anchored in a capitalist, market-based society, and governed by the principles of democracy and freedom. Furthermore, rarely (if ever) do we imagine this type of nation as socialist in nature, where conformity and adherence to the rules determine general practice. But due to the opening of China's economy to western ideas and practices, that image is starting to change.

In China, *creativity* has come to be identified by its communist leadership as an important factor in bringing the nation forward, so that it is on par with those located in the industrially-advanced capitalist West. One challenge facing China in this process, however, is figuring out how to position itself between the extremes of a persistent socialist culture and that which is emerging as a result of its emulation of a western-style free-market economy. Feeding into this predicament is the way people in China, especially those charged with the responsibility of bringing the nation forward interpret the idea of what it means to be creative. According to the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2006-2010), China's most recent plan on national social and economic development, those charged with this task include goods manufacturers and the various service workers who assist them in making their products marketable.

This dissertation examines the way different groups of social actors, those listed above, make sense of and lay claim to the idea of creativity as it now appears in China. As such, the dissertation is an analysis of Chinese conceptualizations of creativity studied through the lens of contemporary advertising practice. In this dissertation, I focus on the ways professional advertising practitioners, in the act of serving their clients, seek to introduce a reading of creativity that is on par with what one might find in the industrially-advanced western world, and how this reading contradicts many of the ways Chinese people rationalize the term. Drawing on research carried out over a period of fourteen months in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2008, I argue that the efforts of young, educated Chinese professionals to develop their society in parallel to, and in concert with, principles and practices native to the capitalist West are often at odds with the way most Chinese understand such things. This argument has its basis in my experience tracing the development and use of branding by Chinese advertising professionals for their local clients. It was in the context of researching this practice that I came to realize that creativity, while regularly spoken of as a general force and element associated with branding, carried wildly different meanings depending on who was speaking.

Creativity: Between Theory and Reality

In the dissertation, I rely on ethnography for many purposes. To begin, ethnography is essential for producing a sense of the environment in which my study was carried out. Furthermore, ethnography plays a key role in introducing and animating the lives of the individuals whose thoughts and actions frame the topics under investigation. But what truly makes ethnography valuable is its ability to disrupt the settled nature of categories (Marcus and Fisher 1986). My approach to the study and definition of creativity in this dissertation is one informed by ethnography. I adopt

this approach for the simple reason that doing so provides not only a better, but as far as concerns this analysis, a more accurate means of explaining the concept.

When scrutinized, what one finds in regard to the social scientific analysis of creativity is an abundance of theoretical explanations of the term. To demonstrate this point, consider the following examples.

“Creativity is the ability to come up with ideas or artefacts that are *new, surprising, and valuable*” (Boden 2004: 1).

“Creativity is the ability to generate something new. It means the production by one or more people of ideas and inventions that are personal, original and meaningful. It is a talent, an aptitude. It occurs whenever a person says, does or makes something that is new, either in the sense of ‘something from nothing’ or in the sense of giving a new character to something. Creativity occurs whether or not this process leads anywhere; it is present both in the thought and in the action. It is present when we dream of paradise; when we design our garden; and when we start planning. We are being creative when we write something, whether it is published or not” (Howkins 2002: ix).

“Creativity—the ability to create meaningful new forms” (Florida 2002: 5, citing Webster’s Dictionary).

A characteristic shared in common by these three definitions is their generality. In each instance, what we encounter is the idea of creativity as an ability tied to newness, but what we lack is any sense of specificity over what that ability entails, or where it comes from. This lack of specificity presents a real problem for anthropological

analysis of the concept, because it ignores the fact that besides being an idea, creativity is also something experienced by people. Creativity, contrary to what appears above, is not merely something objective and “out there” to be known, but also something that is social and lived (Bourdieu 1977).

Creativity: Putting the social back in

Writing about *community* in a recent article, Vered Amit (2002), makes the observation that use of the concept in both “quotidian conversation as well as a variety of scholarly work” has gotten away from the concrete description of actual life (Amit 2002: 3). While Amit ultimately views this migration as tied to social analysts’ interest in using community “as a vehicle for interrogating the dialectic between historical social transformation and social cohesion,” I draw on her point to make the claim that the same has occurred with our common use of creativity (Amit 2002:2). Often, when we encounter people making use of the concept of creativity, rarely is it employed to mean a specific understanding of the concept. Instead, what more likely is meant is the *idea* of creativity *in the abstract*. As an abstract idea, creativity, like “community,” “culture,” “ethnicity,” and “identity,” becomes not a thing, in-and-of-itself of the social, but a “quality of sociality” to be found (Amit 2002, Mazzarella 2003, Munasinghe 2001). Herein rests the greatest difficulty associated with dealing with creativity in solely theoretical terms. To treat creativity as a general trait, an “ability” that denotes sociality, is to assume either its presence or absence, a problem that is tied to what one is supposedly looking for.

Practically every assessment viewing creativity as an “ability,” does so on the basis of this ability taking a particular form. Generally, this form is identified as a sort of behavior characterized by risk-taking, curiosity, originality, and so forth (see Table 1 for a complete list). Yet it is from a culturally western perspective that we come to

view creativity this way. For in reality, creativity is conceptualized differently cross-culturally. Testifying to this fact are recent ethnographies, like James Leach's study of creativity in Papua New Guinea (Leach 2003) and Michael Puett's study of creativity in China (Puett 2001). Like them, I, too, argue that we cannot take for granted the idea that creativity is everywhere the same, an argument I make on account of my experience at GLBJ.

Table 1: Common Characteristics of Creativity in the West

Flexible	Insightful	Intuitive
Original	Visualize	Self-critical
Intelligent	Fluent	Risk-taker
Independent	Sensitive	Knowledgeable
Synthesize	Imaginative	Analytical
Perseverance	Connected	Curious
Resilient	Focused	Tolerance of Ambiguity

(Source: Elliott, Kratochwill, Littlefield Cooks and Travers, 2000)

The idea that creativity is not imagined everywhere the same is made clear when we consider what it is that creativity connotes cross-culturally. As a concept in the West, in particular North America, creativity is often identified as a radical break from something that has come before (Weiner 2000). This reading is present in many analyses of the concept, including anthropological studies (Amabile 1996; Rosaldo et al. 1993). But such a reading appears out of place and problematic when transported to other cultural settings. The reason for this has to do with what social psychologist Elisabeth Rudowicz explains as the essential non-existence of this element in other cultures' conceptualization of creativity (Rudowicz 2003; 2004). Unlike in the West,

where creativity is known in terms of “*invention* and *novelty*, a willingness to *reject tradition*, orientation on *self-actualization*, celebration of *individual accomplishment*, and concentration on the *future*,” creativity in other cultures may be associated with none of these things (Rudowicz 2004: 59). However, even if such elements are not present, this does not negate the notion from existing in a non-western perspective. Take, for instance, the conceptualization of creativity in China.

According to Rudowicz, creativity in China (and Far Eastern culture more generally), tends to appear as something bound by tradition with an emphasis on “maintaining harmony with the forces of nature” (Rudowicz 2004: 61). Giving rise to this perception is the influence of specific cultural values, like “interdependence, collectivity, cooperation and authoritarianism,” which posit an understanding of the emergence of the “new” as coming from “one’s commitment to the [persistence] of the socio-cultural system” (Rudowicz 2003: 276). Values like those just mentioned stand in stark contrast to those upon which western cultural framings of creativity are derived—individuality, democracy, and freedom (Weiner 2000). Therefore, when one encounters creativity in China, rather than experiencing a process designating “radical change or reconceptualization,” what is more often met is “creativity...[in] the form of modification, adaption, renovation, or reinterpretation” of that, within society, which came before (Rudowicz 2004: 61, see also Puett 2001).

Designation of the different ways cultures conceptualize creativity is central to my argument in this dissertation, which is not that we must find or develop yet another or more universally applicable definition of creativity’s meaning. Rather, my argument is concerned with how to explain the conceptualization of creativity in clients’ and GLBJ employees’ divergent approaches to advertising and branding. Specifically, this argument stems from how creativity is used in the context of a

multinational advertising agency to meet the needs of local Chinese advertisers, and the conflicts induced by employees' reliance on culturally western readings of the concept.

By making use of ethnography, I seek to illuminate how western-trained, Chinese employees, possessed this perception of creativity as a result of their work practices being firmly rooted in a western-style corporate culture, where creativity represents a core value of good business management, and draws on western formulations of the concept. For what employees often found themselves confronted with in requests from clients for advertising and branding services were not simply requests for "effective communication," but more so petitions seeking assistance in managing their businesses in a modern way. These requests, however, encountered challenges from clients' own perceptions of creativity, which drew much more on traditional Chinese cultural conceptions.

Creativity in corporate business settings

The idea of creativity is strongly present in the western corporate business setting (both theoretically and actually), much more than in its Chinese counterpart. Reasons explaining this emphasis revolve around creativity's imagined importance as a tool used in effective business management. This perspective is promoted in a recent *Harvard Business Review* article (Florida and Goodnight 2005). According to Richard Florida, an economist, and Jim Goodnight, CEO of SAS Institute, creativity serves an important role in business management because it is *the* force responsible for increasing a company's overall productivity. Citing a company's "workers" as the source of this creativity, Florida and Goodnight explain that by practicing certain beliefs and behaviors, "creativity" can be unlocked and used to a company's competitive advantage (Florida and Goodnight 2005: 126). The first practice stated

involves the removal of workplace elements (environmental and psychological) which obstruct or impede employee performance. These impediments and obstructions include the extermination of “bribes,” such as those which are financial in nature (i.e., stock options), or elements which influence motivation (Florida and Goodnight 2005: 126-27). Another factor argued as encouraging creativity is the minimization of “hassles,” social and emotional concerns and distractions that might have a negative impact on employee working ability (i.e., the availability of “benefits”) (Florida and Goodnight 2006: 127). A second practice cited relates to the establishment of an “egalitarian” working environment, where all employees have a say in how work is done.

Additional suggestions dealing with how to effectively manage a company’s “creative capital,” appear, like “hear[ing] customers’ voices” (Florida and Goodnight 2005: 130). But what makes their argument truly interesting is the way the idea of creativity discussed adheres closely to the western belief that freedom, democracy and individualism are responsible for bringing creativity about. I bring this point up for two reasons. First, keeping in line with my argument above, because the conceptualization creativity takes on is, in part, determined by culture, plus the fact that Florida, Goodnight and others writing about business practice are, themselves, situated in a western cultural context, it comes as no surprise that their theory of management illustrates a western cultural bias. The second reason has to do with the focus of this dissertation. Branding is, at least theoretically, identified as a western business practice, one predicated on the use and expression of creativity. Taking into account what Florida and Goodnight are saying, such an understanding of the factors contributing to the fostering of creativity (Howkins 2001) appear less well situated in the Chinese business context.

Although changing, Chinese corporate business practice retains a strong cultural orientation toward values emphasized in traditional Chinese culture, which were in part reinforced by socialism. Scholarship dedicated to this topic often alludes to this fact. For example, in their article on the current nature of Chinese business management practices, Hui Wang and Shuying Xu, note how the persistence of traditional attitudes by Chinese CEOs is thought to be hurting the potential and productivity of domestic companies (Wang and Xu 2006: 87).¹ Attitudes associated with being autocratic in decision-making, or conservative, are viewed by the authors as business pitfalls because they are not seen as providing a good foundation for helping Chinese businesses survive as independent, that is, non-government sponsored or protected, enterprises.² Wang and Xu make their argument according to the same basic logic as Florida and Goodnight, which is that more appropriate and better business management is predicated on approaches stressing openness and interaction. For “highly complex approaches that rely on seduction not only have a *normalising* effect on employee work habits, they also influence their attitudes” (Wang and X 2006: 87; emphasis added).

A problem I see in the above argument made by Wang and Xu is similar to one I argue is associated with GLBJ employees’ approach to creativity, and additionally, branding. This problem relates to the way the western conceptualization of (how to do) business is placed in the vanguard of *all* cultural forms of business practice, disavowing the legitimacy of the other forms. It is only since the 1990s that Chinese companies have actively adopted business practices and theories which are associated with the cultural West. During this period, Chinese businesses have

¹ An older, but still valuable analysis of this relationship is Richard Silin’s 1976 ethnography of Taiwanese businesses under economic transition, and the effect of traditional cultural beliefs on Taiwanese corporate culture.

² In the western cultural framing of CEO behavior, conservatism is often identified as being “risk-adverse”.

experienced enormous change and growth. However, even with this change, Chinese businesses continue to maintain traits characteristic of earlier times and systems. One of these traits is the attitude business leaders have towards creativity, which is influenced by socialist practice as much as by traditional Confucian and Taoist beliefs. For the most part, creativity still appears to be something that is shaped by tradition in Chinese corporate settings, meaning it does not match the creativity of western business theory. But to what degree this is actually the case is something my analysis aims to examine.

The Setting

At a busy intersection in Dongcheng District, not far from the on-ramp to the Second Ring Road at Jianguomen Avenue, one of the main thoroughfares linking the various sections of the city together, sits GLBJ. Located roughly a mile east of the city's famed Wangfujing Shopping Street, the agency could be found nestled amongst the rubble of demolished *hutongs*, the ancient walled-in neighborhoods of "Old Beijing," which were being razed to make way for the erection of modern office buildings, private clubs and hotels. Constructed out of concrete, glass and metal and square in shape, this plain and modest building cut an unimpressive figure in a cityscape of post-modern and ancient architecture. GLBJ, short for Global Local, Beijing, had been an occupant of the building for one year by the time I began my fieldwork in 2005. Prior to 2004, the agency occupied space in another building in the city in the Central Business District (CBD), not far from its current location. Expansion of its business due to accelerated growth of China's advertising industry in the late-1990s and early in this decade served as a catalyst for the move (Hong 2004), as greater demand for its services had required the agency to hire more and more workers to meet this demand.

GLBJ is a subsidiary of a larger, multinational advertising firm named Global Local. While the largest of this company's offices in China, GLBJ represented just one office out of three that made up the larger agency's network of offices in the country. Outside of the Beijing office, agency locations could also be found in two other mainland metropolises—Shanghai and Guangdong—as well as in Hong Kong, which served as the agency's Asia-Pacific headquarters. The agency's global headquarters are located in New York City, 6,843 miles away from Beijing. Even though these two cities occupied roughly identical latitudes, more than just geographical distance separated the two offices.

Unlike New York or Tokyo, GLBJ was not nestled in an environment of advertising agencies, such as what one might find along Madison Avenue. As I would come to learn during my year at the agency, only one multinational advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson, was to be found along the same street. Instead, the location of advertising agencies within Beijing was a rather eclectic arrangement, with the offices of both major multinational and large, medium and small domestic firms scattered throughout the city, with the majority clustered in the city's expansive Chaoyang District, which spread east by north-east from the center of the city. The fact that GLBJ existed outside of the confines of the sort of creative milieu analysts of advertising and the cultural system in which the profession is commonly situated generally expect to find, speaks to the nature of thought surrounding the practice of advertising in China. For the agency's isolation from an identifiable space in the city helps to illuminate not only its distance from other entities like itself, but also the distance of the ideas about creativity it sought to share with the broader society of which it is a part.

Global Local's expansion into China followed a series of both localized and international trends undertaken by transnational advertising agencies to gain access to

China's emerging consumer markets (Davis 2000). Beginning in the late 1970s, and extending through the 1980s, China's government initiated a process whereby it promulgated and ratified domestic policies and laws aimed at the improvement of China's domestic advertising industry through the courting of foreign expertise and technology exchange. These actions corresponded to a more general set of practices adopted by the government to help China "catch up" and attain a similar degree of development within its industries as could be found in industries in other parts of the world (Naughton 1999 [1995]; Keane 2007; also see Chapter Three). As explained in Chapter Four, foreign agencies first entered China as part of a knowledge exchange program between foreign experts and local practitioners; in the process forming joint-ventures with local advertising firms. However, also motivating this expansion of foreign advertising expertise into China was the interest of western advertisers in marketing their products to Chinese consumers. With basically no knowledge of the terrain or the sort of domestic advertising agency options which existed, western companies instead relied on the presence of agencies with which they were familiar and had contracted with in their home countries or other markets to help them navigate China's emerging markets (Pollay, Tse and Wang 1990).

While government policy has played a key role in the establishment of a foreign presence in China's advertising industry, it does not account as the sole logic operating to explain transnational advertising's continued interest in the country. Of equal importance is what Arlene Dávila explains as transnational advertising's interest in the U.S.-based Hispanic advertising agencies she studied (Dávila 2001). In discussing what she calls "mainstream advertising's" influence on the development of Hispanic advertising, Dávila points to transnational advertising's interest in being able to make a legitimate claim to possessing a core competency of knowledge about how to market to Hispanic/Latino/a consumers. While the process she describes concerning

transnational advertising's incursion into this field differs in its specifics from the Chinese situation (Dávila explains that it has been through the specific act of buying Hispanic firms that has brought mainstream advertising into this realm), the impetus is the same, thanks to an emphasis within western advertising practice on segmented and targeted marketing.

In China, the issue Dávila points to is most often discussed in terms of the way foreign, in particular western, advertising agencies have sought to “localize” themselves in China through various means, not the least of which is through their workforces (Wang 2000; Li 2006; Wang 2008). As Jing Wang argues in her recent book on advertising in China, the issue of transnational advertising agencies' interest in localizing their practices as a means of increasing their appeal to advertisers (both domestic and international) first emerged in relation to discussions about ideas about cultural globalization (Wang 2008: 39; see also Watson et al. 1997). Initial impressions that foreign advertising served as a new force of western colonialism (Anderson 1984) arose due to the practice of using a standardized set of strategies and ideas to market products cross-culturally. But as Wang explains, transnational advertising (but less transnational advertisers, see Mazzarella 2003) has, since the beginning of the decade, moved away from such procedures, and toward more “localized” or “targeted” forms of practices to reach their market audiences. In the process of doing so, she argues that understandings of what it means to be local must be reconfigured, as many of the older frameworks used to assess this situation can no longer attest to what is actually happening on the ground.

Methods

The research I conducted for this project took place over four years, beginning in the summer of 2004 and culminating in a one-month visit to my fieldsite in

September, 2008. Interspersed between these two end-points was a period of one year, when I moved to Beijing to carry out the bulk of my research. As a means of collecting data, I employed a mixed methodology of participant observation, in the form of an internship, open-ended and semi-structured interviews, recorded personal narratives, and administered a questionnaire.

My engagement with the professional world of advertising in Beijing started in late April, 2004, when I drafted and sent letters of introduction to the heads of twenty-eight branch offices of western-based (U.S. and western European) advertising agencies operating in China. Of these twenty-eight, fourteen letters were addressed to general managers of firms in Beijing, and fourteen to general managers in Shanghai. These letters stated my scholarly interest in the field of advertising in China and my hopes of doing field research among their staffs. The reason for contacting firms in both cities was based on three factors. The first factor corresponded to geographic considerations. Beijing and Shanghai represent mainland China's largest municipalities, which in turn house some of the country's largest concentration of industries (which in turn make up the client base served by the advertising industry). It is also the case that outside of Guangzhou, in the southern province of Guangdong, the majority of China's advertising agencies (both foreign and domestic) are located in these two cities. The second reason for my decision to send letters to both cities had its roots in a much more practical concern. By targeting agencies in both Beijing and Shanghai, I felt I had an equal chance of garnering the interest of a general manager sympathetic to my request to interview members of their staff for my project. Yet the most important reason I sought access to multinational agencies concerned the study of creativity.

As noted above, western cultural influence is particularly strong in business in China. However, it remains unclear to what degree and for what reason Chinese are

turning and adopting ideas and forms of practice deemed central to the attainment of success and progress in North America. Looking at and situating myself in a multinational agency provided a perfect opportunity to analyze creativity as one of these central concepts, and to learn if it possessed the same degree of value in China as in the West.

To my initial surprise, the bulk of responses (four out of the twenty-eight) originated from Beijing, with just one coming from Shanghai. The reason for my surprise at this turn of events came from the fact that I had, at the time of writing the letters, assumed that Shanghai would serve as the host city for my research, due to its long-standing identification as China's commercial capital. In the earliest phase of preparing my research in the topic of advertising in China, I consulted what at the time represented the bulk of scholarship on the subject from a social scientific perspective. As a result, I found myself highly influenced by two works in particular: Sherman Cochran's historical account of the modernization, by way of westernization, of Chinese advertising in an article entitled "The Transnational Origins of Advertising in Early Twentieth Century China," (Cochran 1999), which is set in Shanghai, and Leo Ou-fan Lee's (1999) work on the centrality of Shanghai to the modernization of communication practices in Republican China (1911-1949), specifically the 1930s, which is widely acknowledged as the gold era of advertising in the country. But history is one thing, and as my investigation of advertising is indelibly a contemporary one, exploring the influence of market transition on the industry and profession, contemporary times have witnessed the spread of advertising to newer locations, including Beijing.

My reason for targeting branch offices of western advertising agencies was similarly pragmatic in nature. Being non-Chinese and coming from the United States, my ability to access members of China's advertising community was severely limited

by the fact that I was a complete outsider to the profession. Knowing the almost total impossibility of locating a domestic agency on my own in which to conduct research (by 2005, the number of domestic advertising agencies in China was close to 85,000 and growing rapidly, see Wang 2008 for further discussion of this issue), I instead focused my energy on gaining access to a western-based agency and branching out from there. The access I hoped for finally emerged following a series of unplanned informal meetings with the general manager of GLBJ. The most significant of these encounters occurred at an event celebrating the birthday of the agency's founder and the opening of its new offices in the Dongcheng district of Beijing. This event served as an entry point to my return a year later as an intern in the company's account planning department, as it facilitated my introduction to a number of key executives within the company. Through discussions with these individuals, I was able to explain the aims of my research as concerning the observation of daily workplace activities and interviewing of staff, to learn how these activities influenced the production of advertising in China.

During this same trip in 2004, I also secured permission to visit the offices of a rival multinational agency, but upon my return in 2005, I decided to give up on the idea of doing a multi-sited project. This decision was influenced by a number of factors. Because of my internship at GLBJ, I found myself spending the bulk of my time within its offices, with very little time available to travel across town to the other agency's offices. Besides this logistical issue, my position as an intern at GLBJ granted me access to an ever-widening network of employees and spaces that my irregular visits to the second site never afforded me. And lastly, to avoid any suspicion of being thought a corporate "spy" (I was once, half jokingly, asked by a creative director if I would "spy for them"). In the long run, what I report, analyze, and discuss in the following pages is based on my experiences getting to know the employees of

GLBJ, and the nature of the environment which informed their working lives.

The second phase of my research in Beijing took place over the course of one year. For a period of nine months (July-December 2005 and February-May 2006), I interned in the account planning department of GLBJ. The primary objective of my research was to study knowledge practices associated with the production of advertising, in particular the practice of branding. My involvement in these specific forms of knowledge acquisition and exchange serve as an important source for how I have come to understand the formulation of modernity in China. During this time, I also conducted interviews with other agency staff. Specifically, I spoke with account services administrative staff, creatives (copywriters, art directors, and creative directors), middle and executive management and other industry practitioners, such as censors, media planners, television directors and producers. In the dissertation, I draw on these interviews to argue that the building of brand identity through advertising demonstrates a key dimension of how cultural identity in China helps goods branded as Chinese-made, rather than Chinese-assembled, to compete not only overseas but also domestically for consumers. Chinese consumers increasingly rely on media such as the internet to gain knowledge of themselves as modern persons, in contrast to information supplied by the government. Brands operate as an equally powerful force, as now much of this personhood is being expressed through knowledge gained and articulated through the consumption of brands (Miller 1994).

The third, and final, phase of this project took place following a two and a half year period during which I worked on piecing together my data into a viable analysis of advertising in China focusing on the issue of creativity. But as often happens in the course of writing, as certain aspects became clearer, others became less so. Therefore, in September 2008, I went back to Beijing for a month, spending two weeks administering a questionnaire and follow-up interviews with members of the agency's

Creative Services department staff, while also collecting documentary evidence of China's shifting social framework. The aim of doing so was to help me further objectify observations noted during my stay in 2005-06 on the role of consumer insights in the branding process.

In retrospect, this last trip proved to be the most enlightening of the three, in large part because of what I learned as a result of the breakdown of part of my methodology. Throughout this project, the one group whose perspective on work continuously seemed to escape my grasp was that of employees within GLBJ's Creative Services department. In an attempt to remedy the absence of this perspective (or at least come to terms with what initially did not seem like a feasible explanation), I produced a survey questioning Creative Services staff about their attitudes toward their work. I was disappointed to find that the questionnaire did not accomplish the task it was designed to do. But, when I inquired during interviews with staff why only a quarter of Creative Services staff answered the survey, I found my mood lightening. In what can only be thought of as an "ethnographic moment," I learned through explanation that my frustration with the survey's failure had far less to do with the artifact itself (although a number of individuals asked claimed exactly that) (Riles 2000), than with its intent. In my search to uncover what I was treating as the "hidden" perspective of Creative Services staff, I made the mistake of assuming that a shared sense of consciousness about creativity as a benchmark of work being produced by GLBJ was possessed by all of its employees. I now know that it clearly was not. While my data hinted toward this understanding, primarily in the form of statements by staff of various departments that many local staff members "didn't know what it meant to be creative," the failure of the survey helped to solidify this conclusion. This lack of consensus is an issue I address more formally in the dissertation.

From the outset I emphasized to those I worked with that my internship was designed to help interject me into the working environment experienced by advertising practitioners in China. And while I made sure to clarify this point, not everyone responded in a favorable manner. Those who did so often declined my requests for interviews. But these instances represented exceptions rather than the norm. For the most part, members of this community were generous in sharing what little free time they had, and were willing to work with me and tolerate my many questions about what they did on a daily basis. Most of the research conducted for the project was done using Mandarin, but at times English was also used when it was clear that my interviewees possessed enough knowledge to be conversant and understand what was being said.

Besides time getting to know employees at work, I also had the opportunity to get to know many of them outside of work. Happy, casual gatherings often served as the source of these “leisure-time” get-togethers, such as the birth of a child, Christmas parties, but most often occasions where eating was involved. Many of the insights gained into the contours of the advertising world and branding in China emerge as a result of this method of “lunching” where I found staff would speak much more freely about their feelings, in part because the camaraderie produced by being able to talk about on-going projects with others undergoing similar experiences, and the lack of intense pressure felt when actually at the office.

Outline of Chapters

The dissertation is comprised of seven chapters. In Chapter Two, I discuss the internal structure and operations of Global Local, Beijing, or GLBJ for short, focusing on how the agency sought to position itself in the Chinese market by marketing itself as the agency of choice through an emphasis on claimed expertise on the management

of creativity. In Chapter Three, I then examine China's turn to innovation as a development strategy. In this chapter, I focus on the influence of professional forms of expertise, flowing from international development bodies, has had on the government's decision to adopt this logic as it continues to implement economic reforms. I do this in order to discuss the background of the opening into which non-governmental actors, like the employees of GLBJ, are now stepping into to help China's communist government achieve its aims of modernizing China while not relinquishing its claims to having brought these changes about. It is in Chapter Four that I return to an analysis of advertising in China, and do so by considering the role advertising has played over time in shaping understandings of the nation. It is also in this chapter that I take up the issue of ideology, especially the political ideology of socialism, and how what appears to be a contradiction in terms regarding the use of market mechanisms as a means of development actually corresponds to the notions of Chinese modernity examined in Chapter Three.

Creativity is the subject of Chapter Five, and is examined as an issue standing in the way of producing "proper" advertisements. My discussion of this issue in this chapter hinges on recent anthropological investigations of creativity as a contested concept among adopters of neoliberal development strategies, which I use for understanding a supposed "lack of creativity" among clients served. In Chapter Six I turn to the analysis of the making of a new brand identity for a Chinese consumer electronics company, a former state-owned enterprise, I call Qingsong, to investigate the degree to which Chinese are or are not creative. And finally, in Chapter Seven, I conclude my analysis in the dissertation by revisiting my arguments on creativity and modernity as they appeared in the body of the work.

CHAPTER TWO:

“GLBJ: EAST MEETS WEST”

“A Day at the Office”

A “typical” day at GLBJ begins around ten-thirty in the morning. This is the time of day when most employees who work in Account Planning and Creative Services arrive at work to start their days. By this time, however, employees of the other two main division of the agency—Account Services and Public Relations—have already been hard at work for close to two hours. But because employees of Creative Services and Account Planning tend to work much longer hours than the others, often not leaving the office during major projects until around midnight or later, starting after ten is the norm. Therefore, for this group of workers, arriving after ten was considered getting an early start; sometimes staff would only come in during the afternoon if the morning was taken up by meetings with clients. Even so, this understanding is not shared by all employees, as there are those in other divisions who considered such a late start simple “laziness”.

Shortly after arriving, employees quickly settle into their daily routines. For planners, this means continuing or beginning the process of searching for “insights” to help meet the demands of a client’s request. Computers are switched on, seats are adjusted, and attention is focused on the tasks at hand. By this point in time the air is thick with the scent of smoke, the result of the intermingling of individual cigarettes ignited by art and creative directors. Clouds of smoke emanating from the Creative Services section quickly engulf the entire space in a milky haze. Adding to the increasingly busy nature of the floor is the constant ringing of cellular and landline phones, which often quickly escalated into an intolerable din thanks to the variety of

ringtones fighting for attention and going off all at once. Most noticeable is the ring of the head of planning's phone. "Ring, ring, ring," intones the phone in the rich mezzo-soprano of a soul singer's voice, escalating in pitch until the third ring, after which the pattern repeats itself. Sitting in front of their computers, in order to concentrate in such an environment, employees often don earphones to drown out the noise. Work then continues at a steady pace until lunchtime, when, anytime between noon and one, employees begin soliciting responses to the question either through email, but mainly by simply turning around, of who wants to go to lunch? Lunching together represents a way for employees to catch up with friends both in their own and other divisions at the agency, to share opinions about their current projects and the general state of advertising in China, or simply bond with and get to know other agency employees assigned to the same account team. Because the amount of time one has for lunch largely depends on both the amount and complexity of work surrounding a project, employees generally make their way to one of a number of small restaurants found in GLBJ's immediate vicinity.

Generally speaking, employees spend between one and one-and-a-half hours at lunch, depending on the busyness of the office. During slow periods, such as during my first month, it was common to find pockets of Creative Services empty for what at times seemed like upwards of two hours. But more often than not, employees quickly and briefly congregate at either a canteen or restaurant found in the basement and ground floor of the agency's building; to grab a quick bite to eat before heading back up to work. Lower-level local hires more often than not eat in the basement, whereas expatriate workers and locals in better-paid positions eat in the restaurant.

Employee salaries at GLBJ are on a sliding scale, with local employees making less than their foreign counterparts. However, even within this division there are differences, as local employees working in positions such as account planner or

account manager or higher (depending on department) make substantially more than an account executive in Account Services. Cognizant of the pressures to perform and meet management's high standards for work, it is not odd to encounter employees "ordering in" their lunches, so as to meet one of a number of pressing deadlines.

While meetings with clients can be scheduled for any time during the day, it is most common for employees to engage in such activities in the early afternoon. Very rarely is it the case that a client comes to the agency. More often than not, employees leave the agency's offices and travel across (and sometimes out of) town to a client's offices. Meetings of this nature usually mean an employee is gone for the day, and if he or she does return to the office, it is not until late in the evening after most have already gone home. For those not leaving the office for an on-site meeting, afternoons at the agency also constituted a period for gathering together employees from Account Services, Account Planning and Creative Services, to brainstorm and deliberate over the sort of creative strategy to be pursued in executing an advertisement campaign.

Afternoons account for the period of the day when employees in Creative Services are most active, with this activity often stretching late into the evening and sometimes weekends. It is not uncommon for a "creative," as those working in this section of the agency are known, to stay at the office until well after midnight working. However, an even more specific reason for what on the surface appeared to be Creative Services staff's somewhat questionable work ethic is the rather late time of day when communiqués from other divisions' employees reach a creative. Oftentimes, creatives are the last to receive instruction on how to proceed on a project. The reason for the tardiness of such communications usually has to do with the speed with which Account Services staff can get a response from a client regarding work which has been, or will be done. Without such responses, agency staff cannot proceed, for doing so blindly constitutes too much possibility for mistakes, something

management will never stand for. Therefore, waiting made up a big part of a regular working day for all employees alike.

Because one never quite knows how long the wait will be—sometimes hours, sometimes days—it is fair to say that working at GLBJ is an often hectic and stressful affair. But the employees who work there recognize such unpredictability as part of the natural cycle of working in a field like advertising. And even though many quickly come to tire of the staccato flow of production, most express that these same patterns are what make them come to follow the career paths they have chosen. Like advertising agencies everywhere, GLBJ has no official “quitting time”. Advertising just is not that type of a business. Rather, the way one works on a typical day is to get as much done on a project as possible, with the allowance of a few hours sleep in between, in order to start off somewhat fresh for a whole new round of the same thing the following day.

Introduction

This chapter introduces the advertising agency that served as my primary fieldsite and describes the type of entity and subjectivities deemed increasingly essential to China’s transformation into a modern society and nation. In addition, this chapter is written with the objective of introducing the sort of person drawn into advertising as a profession. I make this move in order to provide a sense of personal identity to the autonomous category of professional knowledge workers addressed in the previous chapter.

This analysis focuses on a discussion of a theme of “East meets West,” a construction used by individuals, primarily foreigners familiar with GLBJ, to describe the strategic approach taken by the agency as a way to position itself as a core actor in China’s strategy of modernization. My first encounter with this construction occurred

during my initial visit to GLBJ's offices in the summer of 2004, an instance marked by a public celebration of the agency's founder and recent move to a new location in the city. However, my interest in this construct stems from the way GLBJ sought to use it as a way of emphasizing the growing importance of western forms of knowledge and knowledge practices in China. I draw on this construction to explain how creativity, as an increasingly valued concept in Chinese culture, is thought about and used discursively in the advertising profession, and how such thinking contrasts with more overtly political and economic uses of the term.

Inside GLBJ

Setting the Tone

Like many multinational agencies, GLBJ operates as a "full-service" agency, meaning it offers a wide-array of services associated with marketing communications across a number of different divisions within its organization. According to Brian Moeran, the notion of a "full-service" advertising agency is based on the fact that "because they are asked by clients to handle not only the strategic planning, creation, production and placing of advertising, but also sales and other promotional activities and services on their [clients] behalf, agencies like to call themselves 'full service', rather than mere 'advertising' agencies" (Moeran 1996: 27). Altogether, GLBJ is made up of four main departments: Account Services, Account Planning, Creative Services, and Public Relation (PR). Media services, another type of activity commonly associated with advertising agencies, is not part of GLBJ's general operations. Rather, the agency contracts with a media-buying house located in the same building to help meet its media needs. While Public Relations is officially its

own company, its employees work very closely with employees in the other divisions within GLBJ, and share a common corporate culture with the others.

Together, these departments occupy a total of three and a half floors, which the agency rents within the building where it is located in the eastern part of Beijing. For the most part, each department occupies a single floor within the building, such as Account Services, which is located on the highest of the floors leased by the agency. But some services offered by the agency are also found nestled together on the same floor. Such is the case regarding Account Planning and Creative Services, which can be found together on the middle floor of GLBJ's offices. In order to reach a specific office, employees and visitors alike enter the building through either a revolving door on the ground floor, or through two stationary doors on located to the left or right of the revolving door. Once inside, employees traverse an air-conditioned lobby on the way to elevators set to transport them to their specific places of work.

A reception desk on the ground floor stands to the left of a short hallway and set of elevators across from the main doors, but it is rarely utilized by anyone coming to GLBJ. The reason for this is because GLBJ has its own reception desk, located on the first of its three occupied floors within the building. Generally speaking, the desk functions as a place where lost or simply inquisitive visitors ask directions about how to make one's way through the building. To help visitors determine where they need to go, a building directory naming the various occupants of the building is placed directly in front of the elevators.

Taking the elevator up deposits employees and visitors alike in what serves as the GLBJ's main reception area. Clearly displayed on a wall behind two young women who work as receptionists for the firm is the agency's name. At first glance, the office appears very modern, and possesses what many visitors to the office described to me as an aesthetic design based on a theme of "East meets West".

More specifically, however, is the self-conscious way the agency chooses to present itself to the outside world. It is obvious that those in charge at GLBJ care deeply about the way their agency is viewed, and take great pains to control that vision. In contrast to the spartan ground floor lobby, the most striking characteristic of the space serving as GLBJ's reception area is the waiting room, which is designed to resemble a gallery space. Along the walls of the space hang a variety of pieces of contemporary art ranging from paintings and multi-media on canvas, to short videos that play on a continuous loop.³ The modern art does not end there, however. A lima bean-shaped couch sits positioned across from a screen on which the short films are projected.

Superficially at least, the idea of creativity as a melding of cultural forms and ideas defining the office is primarily given off by the furniture found in the large meeting rooms and the names of the rooms. In order to express this idea, management at GLBJ named the largest conference rooms, those used most often for meetings with clients at the office, after local famous cultural spots, like the Temple of Heaven (*Tiantan*). But as a foreign agency operating in China, a culture and society only recently reintroduced to commercial advertising, management has also made sure to take seriously the idea of imparting the notion of its localization within Chinese culture and society to outsiders. Besides naming, specially designed furniture is utilized to demonstrate GLBJ's claims to being a source of creativity in China. One example is a table that stands in the middle of the agency's largest conference room. This table is carved so that one entire side is a straight, plain plank, whereas the other side demonstrates the ornate style of carved wood furniture of the late-Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. Walls made of glass allow one to easily peer

³ Adding to the efforts of agency management to emphasize the idea of Global Local's deep commitment to fostering and owning the idea of creativity, some of the art work that hangs in the reception area is work produced by its own employees.

into such spaces, which pay homage to the idea that GLBJ is also an organization which seeking to make the hybrid and creative aspirations of its practices transparent to all.

The Organization of Employee Working Environment

Work space at GLBJ is laid out on the basis of an open floor plan similar in nature to what Carla Freeman describes in regard to spaces worked in by the female, Barbadian informatics workers she studied (Freeman 2000). Freeman's discussion of this sort of work environment lends itself to a discussion of the routine institutional life and practices of GLBJ on account of the way the spatial design of work space influences certain concepts and values held in high regard by practitioners in various types of industries. In her account, Freeman writes,

A great deal of effort has gone into the design of this space, in the partitioning of different work areas and the building of custom-designed computer work stations, as well as in the decorations of pleasing floral prints on the walls, plants in offices, subdued colors of carpeting and paint well suited for fluorescent lighting. Electronically locked doors and the white noise of the computers lend a distinctive aura to these new work settings (Freeman 2000: 141).

As she explains, the concept of the open office corresponds more generally to notions of how work should be done in global capitalism's most current, post-Fordist configuration—flexibly and with great efficiency. In noting how such spaces both mimic, and yet also depart from the design of traditional factory work settings, Freeman focuses on how open offices are imagined by corporate management and employees alike as supporting workers in their productivity. In order to achieve these twin objectives—efficiency and flexibility—employee workspace is designed in the

companies she studied to induce a certain degree of urgency in workers through a mixture of overt and self-styled surveillance practices. According to Freeman, this surveillance occurs in a number of ways—through the lay-out of the buildings themselves, in which the offices of management look down onto the work floor, through office supervisors roaming the floor checking and handing out work assignments, and through the computers the women use, which check for keystroke accuracy. Together, these various practices both consciously and unconsciously combine to produce a certain degree of discipline in workers, thus shaping them into what one comes to think of as “modern” workers.

Work space in GLBJ is also designed according to an open floor plan, but differs from that described by Freeman in the sense that management is also embedded in the same space, and not segregated through vertical distance. Each floor of office space GLBJ occupies follows roughly the same rectangular layout. In order to enter into the labyrinthine space where they work, employees must place a sensitized plastic badge bearing their picture to a sensor pad. Doing so unlocks the glass doors separating workers from both visitors and one another, as not all badges worked on all floors. The reason for this situation has to do with clients. Normally, when an advertising agency is awarded a contract by a client, it is understood that any and all work associated with said client’s account remain secret and separate from that of any other client account, especially clients that compete in the same industry field. To avoid any such conflicts, employee badges are coded differently to prevent potential slip-ups from happening.⁴

⁴ In his account, Moeran also talks about the treatment of client accounts at the agency where he conducted fieldwork in Japan. In comparison, Moeran writes that the method employed by this agency was to literally house different accounts in different buildings (Moeran 1996: 49-50). But seeing how GLBJ, although highly successful and profitable in its business at the time of my study did not then possess the means to segregate accounts this way, not that this how the agency would have done so anyway, it instead employed the method of differently coding employee badges.

At GLBJ, space is also organized to maximize employee productivity, which is identified by the output of the quality of the advertising produced by the agency. Once inside, employee workspace is organized into areas made up of cubicles, sometimes in clusters of four, with two desks to one side, other times in straight lines of two, five, or six spaces, with a divider between each space, are found. Only management sits alone, although no one, not even GLBJ's top executives have a closed office. Creative Services staff is placed together at the longer cubicle spaces, whereas the smaller, more compacted spaces are more common in the area of GLBJ where Account Planning is located, as well as on the floor housing Account Services. Division of employee working environment goes still one step further, with clusters of employees who handle the work of the same client or work under the tutelage of a specific creative or business director, placed together, a trait also mentioned by Moeran in his study of the Japanese advertising agency Asatsu (Moeran 1996; 2006). Similar to the reception area, employee work space is designed on the basis of a particular theme. Yet unlike the reception area, which is clearly designed with the visitor in mind (although an employee working for corporate headquarters once told me that the space also had been designed as an inspiration to employees), the work space is not.

In stark contrast to the somewhat soft aesthetics of the lobby-*cum*-gallery, working spaces at GLBJ more closely resemble the exposed space of a Greenwich Village artist's loft. Like the waiting area, walls in employee office space are painted in the company colors. Whereas the reception area presents what can be thought of as a finished piece of art, employee work space expresses the exact opposite idea. Observable on every floor are pipes that emerge from the top of what appear to be too-short walls, or walls which simply stop and stand grasping for a ceiling they can never aspire to meet. These exposed pipes subsequently continue across what is essentially a "non-ceiling," only to eventually meet up with and disappear behind yet

another wall. Such spaces give off a highly industrialized feel, and the idea that what goes on in such an environment is the structuring of something which only later is to be presented fully formed.

While basically identical throughout, the cubicle desks where employees sit do not mimic the autonomous and interchangeable spaces described by Freeman. Rather, staff desks resemble those found in office environments one would associate with an advertising agency. While each desk is marked by a name plate demonstrating either the English or Chinese name of an employee, most are also piled high with items ranging from marketing reports, magazines and reference texts for account planners, to discarded drafts of print advertisements and art books found at the work stations of Creative Service staff. While odd to the outsider, the taking of English names by local employees is a common practice in China's changing professional environment, although one not adopted by everyone. Initially perplexed by this practice, I soon came to ask employees why they did this. One respondent to my question was Hannah, a Chinese employee who working in Account Planning as a researcher. In Hannah's opinion, the reason Chinese staff choose English names, is because many worry about the inability of foreigners to pronounce their names properly. However, neither this practice nor this attitude is shared by all staff, and not everyone agreed with this explanation. Take Ling, an account planner, who only goes by her Chinese name and refuses to take an English name because she just does not see the point in doing so, or the majority of Creative Services staff, many of whom do not adopt the practice out of personal preference.

In order to make their work spaces their own, employees often decorate their desks with plants and various personal artifacts like pictures of themselves with friends/co-workers—a common sight is a photograph depicting an employee's

participation in one of the agency's various training sessions,⁵ family, and sometimes themselves, as was the case with another account planner, a picture of herself applying mascara in a mirror was pinned to her wall. Employees also display gifts given by the company during holidays or other major events at their desks, such as pillows or small plastic toys bearing the company logo. Sometimes, employees also display awards received from their peers at such grand affairs as awards festivals, like Cannes or the New York Festivals, or from the company itself, thanking them for their hard work.

Besides the meeting rooms described above, smaller meeting rooms and meeting spaces are located on each floor. Large meeting rooms are also located on individual floors, as is the case with the floor where Account Planning and Creative Services are located. In general, it is more common for employees to utilize these smaller rooms while working on projects for clients, which all contain a whiteboard and table with benches. Such spaces serve as the setting of group brainstormings or presentations; therefore serving as addition spaces where employees might foster their creativity. A library located on the floor housing Account Planning and Creative Services doubles as another potential meeting space for GLBJ's employees. Even a game room located on the same floor, complete with a pool table, dart board, and comfy leather chairs, acted as a space for employees to go and contemplate ideas (although this room was primarily used for its intended purpose of providing employees with respite from work).

⁵ GLBJ held the reputation in Beijing of being a good company to work for due to its investment in putting its staff through both general and specific practice trainings. Many employees cited these trainings as a reason why they sought employment with the agency, especially those, like Qing, who had previously worked in other agencies (both local and multinational) and had felt dissatisfied with what they had learned/experienced. Ironical, however, was the fact that even with its good reputation, GLBJ still had a difficult time holding onto what its managers referred to as its "talent," a situation which nonetheless influenced its continuing practice of training new batches of employees.

Structure and Organization

Employee Profiles

To begin to decipher the way in which the aesthetic notion of “East meets West” takes on concrete form at GLBJ, I begin with a discussion of the sort of people who work there. GLBJ employs two main categories of workers, “locals” and foreign nationals, who are commonly referred to among employees as “ex-pats”. Local employees are men and women of mainland Chinese descent who, contrary to what the label suggests, actually come from all over the country, not just Beijing. Predominately single, young men and women in their early to late twenties, some, especially those in middle management positions, are in their thirties to early forties, although it is rare for anyone over forty to be found working at the agency. The majority of these employees hold college degrees (bachelor), with some holding an advanced degree like an MBA. The only exception to this rule are those employees who hold a degree granted from one of China’s art colleges, as is the case with some of the Creative Services staff. Local employees hold positions within every department of the agency, with the largest numbers employed in Account Services and Creative Services.

Foreign nationals who work for GLBJ, also both primarily single men and women, come from a number of different countries. Countries on this list include in alphabetical order: Australia, England, Germany, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Singapore, Taiwan, and the United States.⁶ Just as with their

⁶ Hong Kong was officially returned to China from England after the expiration of England’s lease on the territory in 1997. At this point, Hong Kong was, and continues to be, considerably more -developed economically, and democratic than the mainland. As a result of the transfer, and as a way to assuage fears expressed by Hong Kong citizens of what would happen to their way of life following the transfer of rule back to the China’s mainland government, the city and area surrounding the city was officially

Chinese counterparts, every expatriate employee holds at least a bachelor's degree or higher, with those possessing an advanced degree usually holding positions of greater responsibility. For example two Americans who work in the position of regional business director hold bachelor degrees, and came into their positions through hard work and good timing, as their duties relied more on the activities of the regional clients they represented than on the agency itself. But contrasting their situation was the head of planning who held an MBA, even though he, too, had been in the business for some time. Foreign nationals are scattered throughout every department within the agency as well, with the largest concentration in Account Planning.

GLBJ employs a much smaller number of foreigners than Chinese, in part because such workers are much more expensive to employ than local hires, and also because of the limited roles foreigners can assume as part of the agency's operations in China. As explained more fully in the next section, most foreign employee serve in some sort of management position, and are brought to the agency on account of their expertise managing the development of advertising in other, usually, but not always, more mature foreign consumer markets. Such attributes clearly mark these foreign workers as valuable to GLBJ. Yet even as these attributes also exist, so do deficiencies, as most foreigners working at the agency cannot function in Chinese. Outside of a select few who have studied Chinese in some capacity prior to coming to work at the agency, the majority neither speak, read, nor write the language. This lack of language skills proves to be a significant handicap, especially since the main working language is Chinese, and not English, as is commonly assumed to be the case concerning how business is done in the context of a multinational firm.

name an administrative region of the country (see Dodsworth and Mihaljek 1997 for one analysis dealing with this issue).

As a result, the majority of GLBJ's workforce is made up of local hires, many whom are bilingual as a result of having learned English as part of their school curricula (Henry 2008). It is only among one group of local hires, those who make up the agency's Creative Services staff, that English is not particularly well-known. These two categories of employees are further subdivided into the categories of permanent versus temporary worker. At the time of my fieldwork, GLBJ employed close to 600 regular, full-time employees with this number continuing to grow following my departure in May 2006.⁷ Temporary employees, like me, work at the agency as interns, who in return for their labor are given a monthly stipend minus taxes to help cover the cost of transportation expenses incurred in the course of working there.

While GLBJ's employees all enjoy a relatively high level of education, not everyone working there has studied advertising prior to joining the agency. Rather, the more common story regarding the educational background of an employee is that an individual studied a subject such as biology or economics before making the career choice to go into advertising. One employee who worked in Account Services as a business director had even studied animal husbandry before joining the company. Any experience most have in advertising is what is learned on the job. As an organization, GLBJ can also be broken down according to the gender of its employees. Identifying itself as an "equal opportunity" employer, this claim is for the most part true, although the distribution of workers by gender is wholly dependent on both the sort of position held and the department within which that position is situated.

⁷ When I returned to the agency in September 2008, I quickly learned that GLBJ had grown to the enormous size of 1000 employees in the course of the two years since my departure. However, employing such a large number of employees has proven to be an unsustainable objective for the agency, especially following the global economic downturn precipitated by the crash of the US's and other countries' housing and financial markets in October and November 2008. Because the downturn has resulted in advertisers spending less and less on advertising, the agency has been forced to let go a number of its employees.

Take for example the division by gender of the number of men and women employed by Creative Services and Account Services. In general, more equal numbers of women work in GLBJ's Account Services and Account Planning departments than in its Creative Services department. Outside of its secretarial staff, Creative Services at GLBJ, a department employing graphic artists, art directors, copywriters, and creative directors, employs very few women. Yet this oversight cannot necessarily be blamed on the agency's Creative Services executives or human resources. Instead, the scarcity of women can instead be attributed to a more general trend in advertising as a profession denoting a lower number of women active as "creatives" than men.⁸ Over the course of my stay I encountered only three female employees. Alternatively, Account Services employees are primarily female, such as Qing, an account manager, although men also hold positions in this department, such as James, an account executive, who worked on a number of different types of client accounts, ranging in scope from fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs) to clients in service industries, like banking and airlines.

When looking at the specific positions that comprise Account Service, it is clear that women dominate lower-lever positions, like that of account executive, a kind of administrative assistant who is responsible for taking care of the daily administrative tasks associated with the handling of client accounts, and account manager, while men dominate middle management and executive positions. Account managers at GLBJ are responsible for assisting account directors in compiling research data used in the making of business plans for clients. A lower-ranked position than that of account director, employees who work as account managers are, in reality, "staff," and not managers at all.

⁸ Tish Valles, personal communication

The only women who hold positions at a higher level are foreigners. The one department within GLBJ during my stay that most reflected the fifty-fifty split gained through observation was Account Planning, which employed an almost perfect balance of men and women (six women to four men). However, such a ratio was achievable due to the fact that Account Planning was, at the time, the smallest of all the agency's departments.⁹ Excluding me, this department employed a regular staff of eleven full-time employees—eight planners and three full-time staff researchers who maintained the agency's database of online and offline resources. Together, this department was made up of a mixture of workers from Australia (1), China (7), England (1), and Hong Kong (1). Yet as can be seen from the numbers listed above, while differing from other departments, it was along the lines of employee ethnicity and national identity that Account Planning more closely corresponded to the make up of other departments within GLBJ.

Interviewing individual workers assisted me in learning more about the way employee categories are formulated at GLBJ. In the context of these interviews, I often asked employees about their reasons for wanting to work at a multinational agency. While reasons varied, a common response concerned the nature of “opportunities” (*jihui*) offered by working for such a company. For example, while interviewing one of the Americans who served as a regional business director, she said the reason she decided to join GLBJ had to do with the chance to gain some experience working in China, and the chance to challenge herself with something more “interesting” than what she had been doing in her previous post in Thailand. Coming to Beijing (and Asia more generally) represented the chance to be a part of an emerging situation, one not constrained or pre-defined by long-standing practice, as

⁹ At the time of my initial field research (2005-2006), Account Planning was both the smallest and newest of GLBJ's core departments. But this situation changed by the time of my return in 2008, when Account Planning had more than doubled in size.

would be the case if working in either the U.S. or European markets. For Chinese employees the idea of “opportunity” differed little from what foreigner employees related to me. However, one major difference I noticed between Chinese and foreigner reasons for seeking employment at GLBJ had to do with the changing nature of professions and labor mobility now evident in China following government deregulation of industry and professional job choice.

In her study of this subject, Lisa Hoffman focuses on the gendered and cultural dimensions of emerging contemporary professionalism in China, noting how the government’s deconstruction of the socialist work unit system (*danwei*) that a ensured life-long employment and welfare system, has produced a generation both more and less confident of their futures. In producing this argument, Hoffman astutely turns her attention to the way late-socialist Chinese governmentality, or alternatively, the practice of governing the governing of others, which is a paraphrase of what Thomas C. Wolfe’s analysis of Foucault’s notion of governmentality (Wolfe 2005), is working to shape contemporary Chinese subjectivities. As Hoffman says, adoption of western capitalist economic institutions has forced the Chinese government to reevaluate what makes a person a person of “human quality” (*suzhi*) (Anagnost 2004; Kipnis 2007; Hsu 2007), a particular discourse about culture (*wenhua*) now prevalent in China, which in the face of the dismantling of the old system of governing under Mao (the work unit system mentioned above), is increasingly attached to one’s education, place of work, and type of work.

While listening to the employees who served as my interlocutors, it became clear to me that many young Chinese (the same group who would make up the sort visiting the labor markets Hoffman studied) viewed advertising as a profession imbued with prestige and with the potential to allow people to fully develop into the quality individual imagined by the government as integral to China’s modernization.

Hoffman elaborates on this idea,

Accumulation of specialized knowledge was less important than the accumulation of political capital and expressions of being sufficiently “red” during Maoist times...The logic of state plans and subsidies coincided with intensive political and moral education to produce socialist citizens who could carry China to communist prosperity. Not surprisingly, market-based ideas of competition and definitions of efficiency were not part of this rationality, at least not until the “reform era” began and the above assumptions were challenged. “Redness” and “virtuocracy” (citing Shirk 1982) then receded in importance as the place of professional and technical skills in production and socialist modernization were reevaluated and ultimately promoted...After Mao died and Hua Guofeng arrested the Gang of Four in 1976, politicians and citizens alike tried to put the trauma of the Cultural Revolution’s social and political polarization behind them...Notable for those with educational backgrounds or aspirations was the official shift in emphasis from politically reliable and “red” cadres to “expertise” and “talent”...This post-Mao transition from red to expert recast the role of the educated in terms of talented personnel who would take the place of revolutionary cadres...Policies like these coincided with specific transformations, such as when Deng Xiaoping called management a *science*, which immediately moved it from being a bourgeois object of study to a potential new industry and coveted social position...In addition, in the early eighties the term *rencai* (talented personnel) became prominent in the official press and *rencai* were promoted as a resource necessary for the nation’s modernization...(Hoffman 2000: 6-9; italics in original)

Being one of the “youngest” professions in China, a career in advertising was viewed by many local employees as a vehicle of upward mobility, or at least an opportunity to realize personal growth and aspirations.¹⁰ Such was the understanding impressed on me by a friend working in Account Planning, who told me that she had “always” been interested in working in advertising, and even after initially failing to be hired by GLBJ, persisted in applying until finally she was offered a job as a researcher. For her, working at GLBJ represented “working for the best...because of their professionalism,” which in her eyes was viewed as an essential skill that can be transferred across professional contexts. Others also mentioned the opportunity to be “professional” as a way of improving and capitalizing on the talents (*rencai*) they viewed themselves as naturally possessing as well as gained through their schooling and experience working at GLBJ, something I elaborate on more below in my discussion of the various positions which made up GLBJ’s workforce.

Management Style and the Division of Labor at GLBJ

At GLBJ, labor is also divided along local and foreign employee lines, although such boundaries are not always binding (see Figure 1). While exceptions do occur, it is still important to note in what manner labor is *typically* divided at the agency. Furthermore, besides nationality, gender also affects the division of labor within GLBJ’s organization. Take, for example, management positions. Two types of management positions exist at GLBJ—executive and middle. Executive management positions at GLBJ are overwhelmingly held by foreign workers, the majority of whom, as mentioned previously, work at the agency because of their professional

¹⁰ While I write more about the historical re-emergence of the advertising profession in China in chapter four, my allusion to the idea that advertising is a young profession corresponds to the fact that the field only returned to legitimacy in 1979, at the start of China’s economic reforms (see also Swanson 1990; Stross 1990; Wang 2000; Wang 2008).

expertise gained from working in the advertising industry in more mature market environments. In fact, the top two positions within the agency are held by two Taiwanese-Chinese, both who can point to resumes boasting a combination of over 45 years of experience working in advertising.

The nature and location of the environments management have worked in varied widely. Some of the management I spoke to on this topic explained that prior to moving to Beijing, many, such as the agency's Group executive creative director (GECD, who also served as GLBJ's executive creative director, ECD) and head of Account Planning, had spent time in places like Bangkok, Hong Kong (head of Account Planning), London (ECD), Berlin, Tokyo (GECD) or Singapore; working for either another office within Global Local's international network, or with a different agency altogether. In addition, everyone holding executive positions can lay claim to having spent time working somewhere in Asia, a trait many viewed as integral to their ability to work in China.

The following organizational chart (Figure 1) depicts the way labor is divided according to rank, position, and gender at GLBJ.

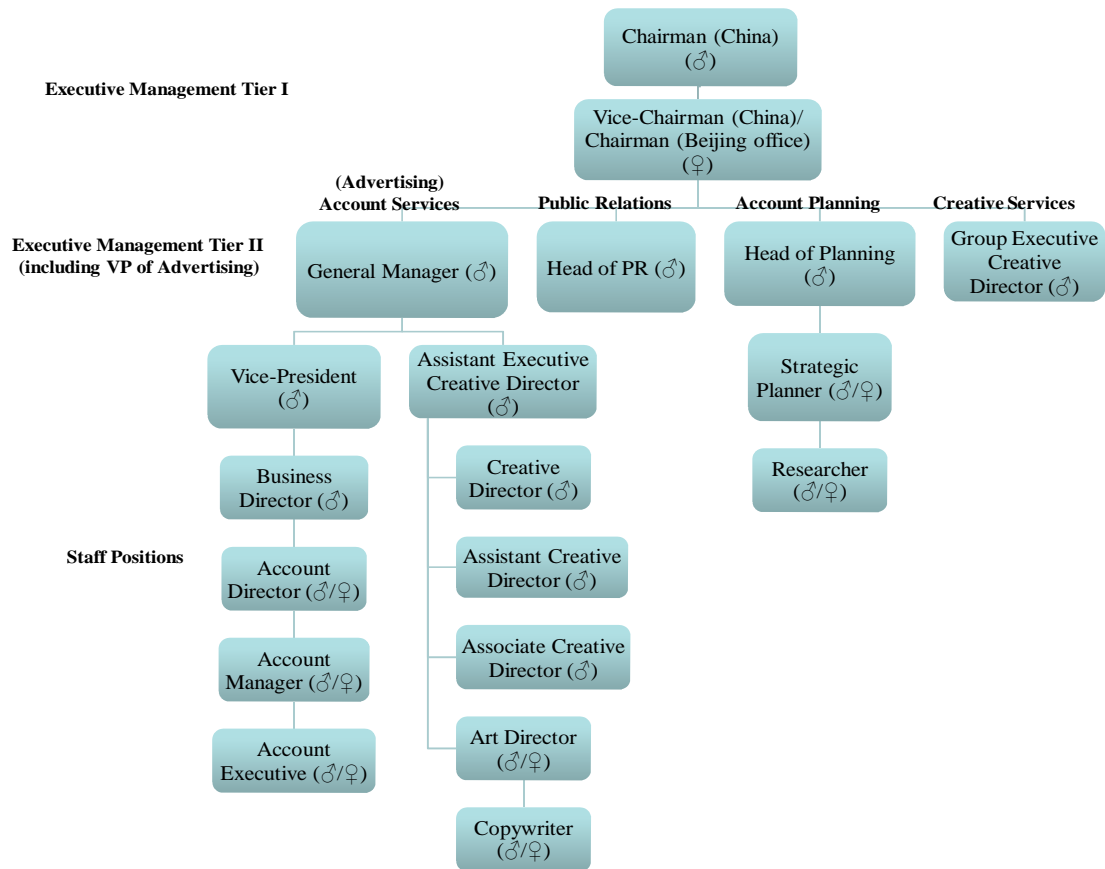


Figure 1: GLBJ Organizational Chart. Source: Data adapted from figure drawn by head of Public Relations

Executive Management

Executive management positions are broken up into two tiers within GLBJ. The first tier is occupied by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman/Chairman of the agency. These two positions were held by the aforementioned Taiwanese-Chinese expatriates—one man and one woman, both in their late-fifties to mid-sixties. The individual who served as chairman, the man, worked as a manager overseeing the way all agencies under the name of Global Local Advertising in China are operated. Therefore, in many ways, this individual served as more of a figurehead within GLBJ's specific operations, for in reality, most of his duties concerned Global Local

in the “Greater China” sphere (China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore).¹¹ The individual with actual power over the running of the Global Local’s Beijing office is the vice-chairman, the woman, who in this position also doubles as the head of the office, a position also confusingly labeled “Chairman”. Besides these two positions, the second tier of executive positions at GLBJ is further divided into the following: head of Public Relations, general manager of Advertising, head of Account Planning, and executive creative director. As illustrated, those holding these positions are responsible for overseeing the work of specific departments within the agency. And similar to the top two positions within the agency, these positions are also held by foreigners—Public Relations: American, Advertising: Hong Kongese; Account Planning: Australian, Creative Services: English. The only exception to this pattern is the individual who holds the position of vice-president of Advertising.

The office of the vice-president at GLBJ is held by the lone mainland Chinese representative among the agency’s executives, a kindly gentleman, in his early forties. His ownership of this position came about as the result of his longevity with the agency. Unlike most of the GLBJ’s employees, this man has been with the company since the office’s founding in the 1990s. As he explained to me, his decision to stay had was not an easy one, as doing so meant giving up a Canadian green card and the opportunity to build a career abroad. But as he also explained, remaining and helping to build the agency into what it had become, meant a lot to him, and subsequently to the agency’s higher-ups as well, who rewarded his loyalty with a vice-presidency.

¹¹ The phrase “Greater China” actually refers to what some scholars, as well as politicians and lay people, mainly businesspeople, think of as a cultural continuum between China and ethnically Chinese enclaves in Asia. See Tu Weiming, 1994 for more on this subject.

Middle Management

Middle management positions, while also primarily the domain of foreign employees, are also held by a few local employees. Local employees working in Account and Creative Services most often hold positions at this level, such as those who served as business or creative directors. Two types of business director positions exist at the agency. The first are regular director positions, the type found in any agency of GLBJ's stature, and the second, director positions, which focus specifically on the management of new client business obtained, or in the hopes of being obtained, by the agency. In general, business directors are responsible for overseeing the work done by individual account teams, or groups of agency workers from Account Services, Account Planning, and Creative Services who are brought together to help meet a request made by one of GLBJ's clients. Individuals in this role serve as liaisons between the agency and a client's business, and are usually turned to by the agency to present work produced by GLBJ to a client's marketing team or CEO. Therefore, business directors at GLBJ really only possess authority in settings such as the one described above, and ultimately answer to both the vice-president and general manager of the agency.

Creative directors at GLBJ work in the agency's Creative Services department and have responsibilities roughly equivalent to those of business directors. One major difference between these two positions, however, is that creative directors do not engage with clients in the way a business director did (meaning they do not engage with clients on a daily basis). Rather, creative directors primarily focus on the sort of artistic work (e.g. advertisement graphic art and copy) produced by employees. Just as in all the other departments at GLBJ, a chain of command is also active among middle management in Creative Services. While granted a large degree of freedom to

determine how a piece of artwork should be produced, these individuals are still required to present both their own work and that of their subordinates to either the executive creative director or his assistant for ultimate approval.¹²

The year I spent at GLBJ, from 2005-2006, marked one of the busiest in the industry's recent history in China, and especially at GLBJ, during which time the taking on of new client business was a common occurrence. In such an environment, everyone was busy, in particular the agency's managerial workforce. While gaining access to employees at the managerial level was always challenging due to their extremely full schedules, in general, accessing those positioned in middle management proved far easier than those in executive management. It was out of instances when it was possible to sit down with these employees that insights into what it was like to work in this capacity at the agency, and why those who did so did, were illuminated. Because the vast majority of employees at GLBJ are young Chinese men and women working in staff positions, those in middle management, middle-aged men, often spoke of feeling a strong desire to "guide" their younger charges. Take for example what was said to me by a Taiwanese business director. One day, while meeting to discuss the nature of his position at the agency, this individual, a slightly older man in his early forties said that he feels that he does a lot of "teaching" as part of his job. Stating that he really liked his team, and viewed them as his "family," he explained,

I look after everyone. I look after employees because I don't think they can really live up to GLBJ's standards; Global Local's standards—"smartness and presentation". I think growth [as in personal growth in this industry] comes from giving staff homework and speaking and reviewing with them. This is

¹² See Moeran's discussion (1996) of the 'total management' style (*zen'in keieishugi*) in his analysis of a Japanese advertising agency as a comparison (and complete contrast) to the situation I describe here.

because I don't have good senior staff to work with. Therefore it is difficult for me to decide who to hire or fire. The final decision on who to hire or fire is made with the General Manager, but as of now I'm willing to keep the staff I have because of the willingness to work hard that they show.

While I mention above that it was middle management who most often shared such feelings as the need to teach with me in our discussions about working at GLBJ, similar sentiments can also be attributed to the agency's top executive, the Vice-Chairman/Chairman, who is highly revered by local staff and often credited for turning the office into the successful operation it was during my stay. According to the same business director, she is one of the main reasons people want to work at the agency (himself included), because unlike many Chinese chief executives (Li 2006), she is viewed as someone willing to take the time and energy to personally address employees' development.

The importance and influence of older, higher-ranked employees to those of a younger generation is a theme also addressed by Arlene Dávila in her work, as well as Carla Freeman in her work on off-shore informatics workers in Barbados (Freeman 2000). Writing about the role of first generation Cuban immigrants to the US on the development of Hispanic advertising, Dávila points out how these individuals represent important figures for how future Hispanic professionals patterned their working styles and practices. Freeman recognizes a similar situation in the data processing companies she studied, noting how young, recent high school graduates working for the companies, looked up to and sought the wisdom of their older ethnic counterparts as a means of thinking through the plotting of their future career trajectories (Dávila 2000: 179). Coming from Taiwan, this individual was seen at GLBJ in a similar light to some other influential advertising professionals of Chinese

descent mentioned by agency staff, such as David Song (an influential figure in Taiwanese advertising), as well as GLBJ's and Global Local's own Chairman.¹³

Staff Positions

The single largest type of non-management employee position at GLBJ is that of the “staff” position, which varied by department. I have already named the sort of positions held by employees in Account Services (see above). Outside of Account Services, however, the next largest department in the agency, Creative Services, employs people working in five non-management positions. Hierarchically, the division of labor in this department is as follows: copywriter, art director, associate creative director, assistant creative director. Other categories of Creative Service employees include producers and online media designers, and Creative Services is broken down into two main types of work—traditional and new media, specifically online, advertising services. Traditional advertising work done by GLBJ focuses on the production of both “above-the-line” (print advertisements, television commercials, search engines) and “below-the-line” advertising (point-of-sale advertising, such as cardboard cutouts found in grocery stores, coupons, generally any type of short-term promotion advertised through the mass media—radio, newspapers, and television). Whereas in Account Planning, two types of staff position exist—that of the account planner and researchers, who help account planners by locating research material, like reports, articles and statistics, used when designing the strategic approach of a client's advertising.

¹³ During my interview with the Taiwanese business director discussed in this section, he mentioned to me the importance of David Song in Taiwan, a man he referred to as the “godfather of advertising in Taiwan, voted number two only after God” and head of an agency called *LianGuang*, roughly translated into English as “Connection Advertising” (translation mine). This individual credited Mr. Song for turning him toward a career in advertising, much in the same way he credited the Vice-Chairman/Chairman for nurturing the young Chinese staff looking to make a career in advertising.

Staff positions are held primarily by local Chinese, and it is only on the rare occasion (outside of Account Planning and Public Relations) that a foreigner might hold this type of position at GLBJ. Part of the reason for the imbalance is the simple fact that even though the official working language of the agency is English, day-to-day operations are always carried out in Chinese. Even for those few foreigners who knew Chinese, the intricacies of conducting business in China often requires knowledge of the language that goes beyond what one might learn in even the best language courses. In short, local employees are simply better equipped than their foreign counterparts to perform some of the duties performed at the agency, a situation noted more generally by anthropologists studying advertising in other cultural settings(Dávila 2001).

While many position names belie the actuality of the duties performed by employees, job titles at GLBJ reflect standard naming practices in advertising as a global profession. Take for instance the position of account planner. While an account planner at GLBJ performs a number of tasks for the agency, a planner's main responsibility is the writing of *creative briefs*.¹⁴ A creative brief, an industry term, is a document that constitutes the core set of ideas used in an advertisement, and is essentially an outline derived from a request sent by a client outlining a general area or direction within which it would like an agency to execute its work. In order to write such briefs, account planners often spend a period of time researching the topic of a request before ultimately sending a brief to other members of the account team to which he or she is assigned. At this point, the creative brief is then shared with the client that has made the request. Because time is always in short supply, the type of

¹⁴ I find that the best way to understand both what and how a creative brief functions within the work process of an advertising agency is to imagine how a legal brief works in the context of a law firm. In both cases, the notion of the "brief" is what is essential to grasp, with "brief" possessing the meaning: "a short and concise statement or written item; an outline, summary, or synopsis, as of a book (Random House Webster's Electronic Dictionary and Thesaurus, College Edition)."

research conducted by account planners at GLBJ when writing creative briefs is what is known as “desk research,” meaning planners often rely on published material (both print and electronic), like consumer or marketing reports (if the agency could afford to purchase them) or simply newspaper reports, to help inform their work. It is only during later stages in the development of an advertising campaign that a planner might turn to more recognized forms of research, like focus groups, to complete their work.

Another less than transparently-named job at GLBJ is that of art director. The title of art director is rather misleading, as those employed in this position are actually just artists, primarily graphic, and not directors at all, and definitely not in the sense as are creative director. Art directors are responsible for producing the main art appearing in an advertisement in accordance with what is written in a creative brief. Another category of worker also somewhat oddly named is that of “producer”. Producers are individuals employed by GLBJ to help edit video work associated with a client’s account, usually video shot for a television commercial. In addition, producers have nothing to do with the media company GLBJ regularly uses for help in acquiring media space for its clients. And finally, rounding out the remainder of staff positions are those employees employed specifically in support roles. Every department has its own secretarial staff, usually one or two young women whose main responsibility is to coordinate the schedules of their department heads and help out with any request made by the head to assist others who work alongside this individual.

Limited Freedom within a System: The Nature of Business Operations at GLBJ

As previously stated, a generalized theme of “East meets West” characterized the nature of business operations at GLBJ. On the basis of my brief discussion of some of the differences existing between GLBJ and other advertising agencies in China, especially local (*bentü*) agencies, and their organizational structures, a picture of the set of ideas governing management practices slowly begins to emerge. Even though the idea of presenting the agency as an organization deeply committed to a harmonious bridging of cultural styles served as the aim of the “East meets West” theme of the office’s designs, in reality the culture with the greatest influence on how it conducted its business was western, and according to one employee, run more like a “Japanese agency” than anything else because of the relatively non-fixed nature of assigning client accounts to employees (Moeran 2006).

With its origins in New York, Global Local’s expansion overseas followed a pattern adopted by many multinational companies of formulating practice according to the home culture of the company (Freeman 2000; Dunn 2004). Considering that advertising in its modern form is first-and-foremost an American invention (see Marchand 1985), it is important to recognize that many of the accommodations made by the profession as it has encroached into foreign territories has been largely superficial, as the logic of the practice still retains a highly North American tone (Kemper 2000; Dávila 2001; Mazzarella 2003; and see Cochran 1999 for a specific discussion about the historical roots of contemporary advertising practice in China).

A key idea underscoring the organization and management of GLBJ is that the agency function in the context of a network-based industrial system (Saxenian 1996), where ideas and information pertaining to the practice of advertising and branding can be easily shared between Global Local's many international offices, not other advertising agencies, as indicated by its location outside of any type of advertising milieu in Beijing. However, this objective is more ideal than reality, as GLBJ is run more in accordance to traditional autarkic corporate principles than collaborative ones, and decisions affecting the running of the business are based more on the demands of the specific market the agency is based in, as well as according to practice guidelines set by the agency's global headquarters.¹⁵

In her book *Regional Advantage: Culture and Competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128*, Annalee Saxenian (1996) defines the meaning of the phrase "network-based system" as a type of industrial system that "promotes collective learning and flexible adjustment among specialist producers of a complex of related technologies" (Saxenian 1996: 2). Though in Saxenian's definition the idea of "specialist producers" refers to the specific types of companies situated in the various industries which have emerged surrounding the electronics industry in Silicon Valley, this term can also be applied to the range of types of workers found in advertising agencies, all of whom work in specific areas of the business as a type of specialist (e.g., account planner vs. creative director).

In terms of its actual style of operations, GLBJ instead functions along the lines of what Saxenian describes as the "relatively integrated corporations" found in

¹⁵ It is important to clarify the meaning of the word *autarkic* that I use here to describe the nature of GLBJ's style of management and operations. *Autarky* has the specific meaning of being "self-sufficient," and more importantly "economically self-sufficient in the context of a political unit," such as subsidiaries or branch offices of multinational corporations tend to exist within the hierarchical system of these types of organizations. As such, both the use and meaning of this word clearly differ from that of *autarchy*, which while related, carries the specific meaning of "self-government" or "absolute sovereignty". (Oxford English Dictionary online edition, Cornell University: <http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu>; visited 22 July 2009).

Boston's Route 128 region. According to her analysis, companies found in this type of industrial system operate as "independent firms that internalize a wide range of productive activities," where "practices of secrecy and corporate loyalty govern relations between firms and their customers, suppliers, and competitors, reinforcing a regional culture that encourages stability and self reliance. "Corporate hierarchies ensure that authority remains centralized and information tends to flow vertically" (Saxenian 1996: 3). It was through discussion with management that I came to learn that GLBJ's business operations follow guidelines dictated by its corporate headquarters in New York. In particular, it was in the context of conversation with the head of corporate communications for the parent agency, an American expatriate who had recently come to the office from Hong Kong, that this relationship was clarified.

As she explained, the reason for headquarters setting the tone of operations is to ensure that the creative work produced by the agency's many affiliates around the work maintain a consistent degree of quality. This attitude has its origins in the belief of its western founder, who, during the years surrounding World War II, established a new position within the profession emphasizing the use of 'creativity' as the basis of a model to sell advertising as a business (Fox 1997). The way in which this consistency is obtained is through the company's overall corporate culture, which permeates all aspects of working life at GLBJ, from the use of the company's colors to paint the walls of its offices, to computer screensavers displaying its name and corporate gifts handed out to employees during major holidays (Chinese only) and special occasions, like the yearly anniversary of the founder's birth. "GLBJ's corporate culture is very strong. It is top-down in orientation, which means that individual offices pretty much follow [*sic*] the direction of the head office." This top-down orientation is important to note, for it plays a central role in the way "creativity" was defined at the office.

According to the office's corporate communications director, a main objective of headquarters is that the quality of products (i.e., advertisements) created by its subsidiaries correspond to a set of standards which are developed in the United States, and then shipped abroad in the form of a standard process followed during the making of advertisements by employees (Mazzarella 2003). This is what I describe as the "Total" Approach below, a process that was strictly followed by the Beijing office. These dictates also influence the way GLBJ's employees, especially management, attempt to identify and take advantage of emerging market trends concerning the use of creativity in China as part of their business operations. Other anthropologists investigating the producers and conditions surrounding advertising in other national contexts have similarly noted the urge for standardization in the profession, even though such an urge is antithetical to the reality surrounding advertisements as products (Moeran 1996, 2006; Dávila 2001; Mazzarella 2003). Encountering this situation at GLBJ specifically reminded me of William Mazzarella's description of the struggles Indian advertising professionals encountered in their efforts to brand global products locally.¹⁶ For while headquarters dictates how its global workforce carries out this process, what it can not dictate is the actual sort of creativity produced by its workers. Moeran expands on this point in a recent analysis of advertising in Japan (Moeran 2006).

Although very much like other kinds of industry—farming, shipbuilding and manufacturing in general—advertising differs in that it has to tailor each of its products to individual corporate clients. It [advertising] produces no concrete,

¹⁶ Specifically speaking, Mazzarella actually describes the difficulty posed to the creativity of the advertising produced by the agency he studied in light of its relationship with the standardizing bureaucracy of a multinational client. What is important to note here is not the fact that he focuses on how multinational clients rather than the foreign headquarters of an advertising agency in India, tried to control the creative process, but the fact that the creative agency of localized advertising agencies is often challenged by a "system," to use his term (2003: 222-225) that tends to impede, rather than facilitate creativity.

standardized product. Every advertising campaign must necessarily be different from those that have preceded it. As such, it consists of a one-of-a-kind, 'non-material' set of ideas (Moeran 2006: 80)

As Moeran indicates, unlike other industries, the product of advertising is first-and-foremost immaterial, in the sense of being something that cannot be brought into conformity like the products of other industries. Therefore, because of the unique characteristic of creativity being something always of the new, or at least of the novel (Boden 2004), the reality that its standardization is impossible actually defies the central logic imposed on creativity by GLBJ's corporate culture.

The vertical organization of business operations serves as a focal point for how GLBJ does business with its clients, and in particular how the agency and its workers use the idea of creativity to distinguish their products from that of their competitors, while also suggesting their superiority as cultural knowledge brokers. At GLBJ, employees, both managers and general staff, regularly speak to the idea that GLBJ is a company, that, while engaged in "being creative," is also simultaneously engaged in highly rationalized, (supposedly) extra-cultural practices emphasizing neutrality in business relationships, and therefore avoiding many of the perceived problems of local agencies which are viewed as too caught up in the practice of *guanxi*, or interpersonal networking (Li 2006; Yang 1994). I gained such an impression about GLBJ's operations from interviews and informal discussions with employees primarily concerning the way agency workers define the notion of "professionalism" in China's advertising industry. Take for example Qing, the assistant account manager working in Account Services mentioned above. In explaining to me her decision to come work for GLBJ, one of the main reasons she cited is the rather impersonal nature of business relationships with clients. Prior to coming to GLBJ she explained

that she had worked for another “4A,” Grey Advertising, and prior to this company with a local advertising agency.¹⁷

Grey was pretty much the same as GLBJ, and the same with the local [advertising agency], except they [local advertising agency] didn’t do brand management; they didn’t have anything like [the] “Total” approach. Both Grey and GLBJ have open cultures, but GLBJ focuses more on creative work; other services [that] support this. Grey is more about business, more account oriented people. GLBJ is more about if the creative [worker] accept account idea. The professional approach of the local agency I worked at was different, no individual branding strategy, a lot is based on the experience of employees, not very stable, and strategic thinking is different. Plus, business relationships are much closer, intimate than in a 4A. I didn’t really like this process, it didn’t really allow for focus on professional strategies. I do see some similarities with 4A, [its] still about communication of business objectives, [but] the job [is] not professional like the 4A’s...locals sometimes don’t like to do research, and the customer also doesn’t care.

According to Qing, GLBJ’s top-down culture of business operations aides her in working, unlike the culture of the local agency where she previously worked. By being required to follow a set procedure in getting an advertisement made, no room exists for what she views as the chaos and confusion associated with employees just approaching a work request on the basis of instinct. A similar story was told to me by James, the account executive. While only in his first year in the industry (working at GLBJ also constituted his first job after college), James also sees himself benefiting from his experience at GLBJ to the extent that he is gaining exposure to an established

¹⁷ “4A” is a moniker/abbreviation for Association of American Advertising Agencies.

set of practices, which allows him to see how local clients can improve the quality of their advertising.

Other scholars writing about the nature of contemporary advertising agencies in China also note the way the organization and management of firms affect business operations. Most recently, Hongmei Li (2006) has written about this in a dissertation comparing the working environments, ideologies, and cultures of multinational (i.e., western) and Chinese agencies. In her analysis, Li indicates that many Chinese agencies, while seeking to emulate aspects of multinational agency practice, also tend to be vertically organized, with agency operations set from above, but with the major difference being that the practice of advertising as a business is directed on the basis of the agency's president or founder's sense of himself (it is always a "him") as a leader. This means no consultation with other workers, just the handing down of what many observers view as "ad-hoc" orders and ideas about what is to be done, rather than an expression of true understanding of what needs to be done.

Li's claim that Chinese advertising agencies generally follow the direction of a single individual is warranted by other studies of enterprise management in China, which also indicate the dominance of a single personality as the source of business strategy and operation (Yi and Ye 2003). The emphasis on personality in domestic Chinese business practice is important, because it speaks to one of the ways GLBJ and its employees' imagine themselves as different from Chinese they both service and compete against. The idea that anything be controlled by a single person harks back to the period of classic socialism in China, where business leaders were most often militarized cadres attempting to meet and fulfill centralized work plans (Kornai 1992). In such situations, product output generated by adherence to Communist theory often had little in common with the realities of actual practice, therefore producing gaps in number or in quality between the thing imagined and thing created. As notions of

what constitutes good business practice have changed, influenced by larger shifts noted above in thinking about what is needed to help China progress into a modern nation, unadvised thinking has become less accepted.

How the Work Gets Done

The Type of Work Done

Generally speaking, GLBJ offers a number of different types of advertising services to its clients. These services include above-the-line and below-the-line advertising, as well as online media production, business-to-business (“B2B”) advertising, merger and acquisition management (Public Relations), consulting, and branding. Within the advertising side of its business, the single most important service offered is branding. The main focus of the agency is on developing good strategic and creative work related to requests for branding from clients, and this goal is met on the basis of a concept I call the “Total” Approach.

The “Total” Approach

Performing branding at GLBJ follows a generalized process of what I call the “Total” Approach. The “Total” Approach is a pseudonym for the name GLBJ gives to the proprietary (and trademarked) set of procedures every employee receives training in as a member of the agency. The idea of “Total” in this moniker refers to the holistic approach adopted by workers in the examination of a client’s request for the branding of a particular product or service. Basically, the “Total” Approach entails performing a four-stage process in which a client’s request for branding is assessed for how a product or service currently stands in relation to consumer lifestyles and lifestyle choices, not to mention social and cultural backgrounds. Such assessments, however,

represent only the first stage of this process. This stage also requires research into the specific aspects of the product or service under review, as well as similar products and services already on the market or offered by competitors to the agency's client. Stage two, then, focuses on the generation of the outcome of stage one's analysis, in particular, the specific perceptions consumers have about the product or service under review. Stage three of the "Total" Approach then focuses on the production of core ideas and concepts which best relate what the outcome of stage two suggests as the most basic identity of the brand-in-the-making. And finally, stage four of this approach constitutes the actual period of production surrounding the execution and ultimate release to the public of the branded product/service in question. Figure 2 serves to illustrate this description.

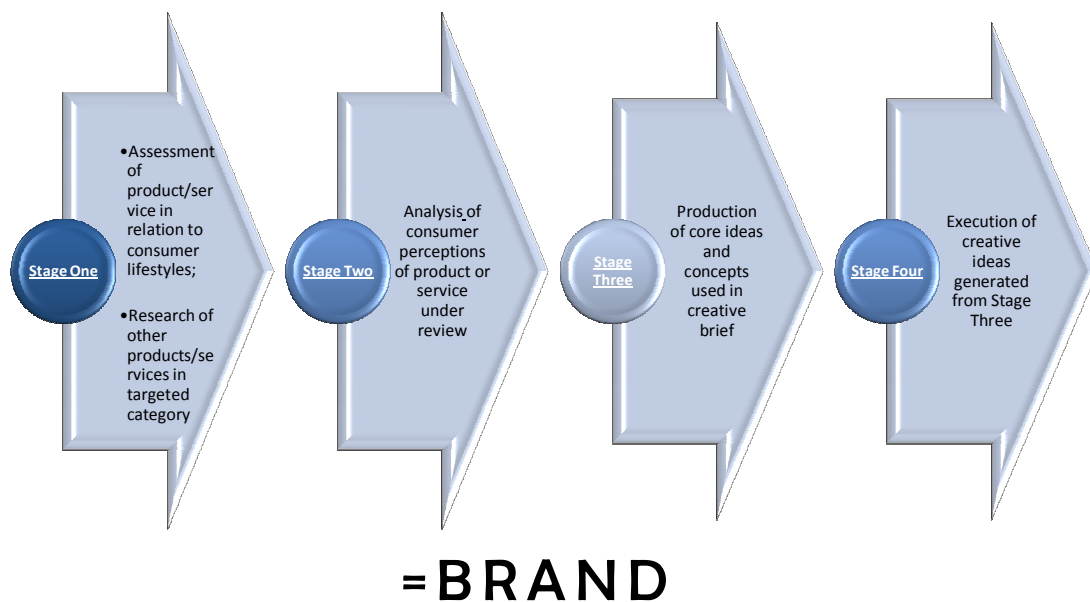


Figure 2: The "Total" Approach. Source: Design by author.

The concept of the "Total" Approach is not unique to GLBJ. In fact, it represents just one of many different names advertising agencies, specifically large,

multinational agencies, give to the practice of brand management. Brand management is a term most closely associated with marketing scholar David Aaker (1991), an idea with its origins in the United States in the early 1990s. Writing about the subject in his book *Building Strong Brands* (Aaker 1996), Aaker discusses the need for companies to invest more in the intangible assets associated with their businesses. In short, such assets represent the various brand-name products and services (e.g. Pepsi cola) owned by a company. Aaker explains that such assets can be broken down into four categories: brand name awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations, which together produce the value of the brand (Aaker 1996: 8). Brands are primarily intangible in nature and viewed as inseparable from the ideas that give a branded product/service its main identity. Any company willing to pay for the production of such an identity becomes a brand's owner.

The reasoning behind Aaker's urging to companies' marketers and executives to manage their brands emerged out of shifts occurring in the nature of how to do business in the late-1980s and 1990s (both in the United States and globally). In the late-1980s, deregulation of markets in the United States and Europe, along with the collapse of many previously-socialist states in Eastern Europe and Latin American, led to an increase in the circulation of goods within countries and across borders. Such economic adjustment worked to produce environments (markets) where the capability of companies to attract (and retain) consumers to their products/services became increasingly competitive. No longer was it the case that companies could survive and/or be profitable solely on the basis of the features of their products/services, as these characteristics could easily be copied. As a result, companies increasingly looked for ways to help set their products/services apart from those of competitors. Out of this search emerged the practice of brand management.

China has not been immune to any of the large-scale changes listed above. In fact, since 1979, the Chinese government has actively engaged in practices of structural adjustment similar to those adopted in formerly socialist Eastern Europe, especially Poland (Naughton 1999 [1995]). Beginning in the mid-1980s, China's communist government began to experiment in enterprise reform, a process marked by gradual intensification and deregulation of government controls over consumer and price markets (Fan and Nolan 1994; Nolan 2001). And yet as Yusuf et al.(2006) indicate, even though the majority of China's GDP is now produced by private, joint-venture and collectively-owned enterprises (fully privatized SOEs), state-owned enterprises continue to persist as actors in the country's shifting economic environment.

Therefore, when I say no contracts are held with the government, what is meant is that GLBJ does not engage in the production of propaganda for the Chinese government, not that it does not have dealings with the government, as this is impossible due to the colluded nature of government involvement in the market via the continued existence of SOEs (Nolan 2001). Requests of this nature (that is, propaganda) are the province of state-owned and operated advertising agencies. One of the subsequent results of Chinese enterprise system reform is an increasing need on the part of domestic firms for "producers' services," or professional services such as advertising or legal counsel necessary for a firm to operate in a competitive market environment (see chapter four), a process also accelerated by other measures of structural adjustment enacted by the government. Helping to fulfill the needs of companies now in need of support in selling their products to consumers are commercial agencies like GLBJ.

Clients

GLBJ provides service to many different types of clients, ranging from large, multinational companies to large and medium-sized domestic companies, private firms, and state-owned-enterprises (SOEs). Essentially, if a company (and it was mainly companies which contracted the agency, not individuals, although sometimes municipal governments of some of the smaller, second- and third-tier cities in China also worked with GLBJ) can afford to hire GLBJ, then the agency will accept their business. The work done by GLBJ is solely of a commercial nature, and no contracts with the federal government were held during my research. However, because of the somewhat complicated nature of China's enterprise system, some clarification of this statement is required. China's current system is characterized by its composition of corporatized state-owned, joint-venture, and fully private enterprises (Yusuf et al. 2006). It is not a tiered system, but rather all three types of enterprises co-exist and are required to operate (ostensibly, that is) under the same guidelines. This system is the result of China's on-going economic reform from a socialist, centrally-planned to market economy.

Over the course of my time at GLBJ, I had the opportunity to learn about the various types of companies approaching the agency. Regardless of the nature of the firm seeking to become the agency's client (or targeted by the agency as a client it would like to have), each is treated in the same manner. Clients approaching GLBJ do so for help solving some sort of commercial problem facing its business, regardless of the company's nature. This is true even in the case of a state-owned consumer electronics company that contracted the agency for help in developing a new corporate and brand identity system. This client, just as with all others working with GLBJ, sought its services for a number of reasons; however, most importantly

because it had recently fallen on hard times as a result of its brand of electronics being viewed by young Chinese consumers as an antiquated remnant of China's socialist past. Its decision to contract with GLBJ hinged on two factors. The first factor concerned the agency's reputation as a firm dedicated to the "building of brands" through the application of "creativity," a statement listed in all of GLBJ's own marketing. While the second factor concerned how the agency could serve as a model for the sort of business practices domestic companies are being urged by the Chinese government to adopt as a condition of China's continued development into a fully industrialized, modern nation (Nolan 2001; Steinfeld 2002). Viewing GLBJ as an exemplar of the notions of flexible and strategic management so valued in the current global economy (Harvey 1989; Dunn 2004), companies, especially domestic, working with the agency often do so with the idea in mind that GLBJ can help to improve their public image using principles a client itself might not have fully embraced as part of its own business practices. However, it is quite often at this juncture that difficulties between client demands and agency practice ensue, a topic engaged more deeply in my discussion in Chapter Six of a case study of the consumer electronics firm mentioned above.

Indexing Creativity

In an analysis of print media in post-unification Germany, Dominic Boyer draws attention to the way the publishers of the glossy entertainment/lifestyle magazine *Super Illu* seek to index "easternness" as a component of contemporary German identities (Boyer 2001). As he argues, although the positive effects of the magazine's stated intention to "promote the preservation and celebration of cultural easternness in the face of, and opposed to, the culture and rhetoric of westernness and international that pervade unified Germany" (Boyer 2001: 11), cannot be overlooked,

it is also impossible to ignore how the magazine is at the same time crafted to produce the sort of culturally authentic material and consumer it claims already exists as its readership. By drawing attention to the socially subtle and nuanced worlds in which media exist, Boyer offers up an insight into the highly political machinations of media production. For as Boyer makes clear in his article, through semiotic analysis it becomes possible to read in the marketing and branding of *Super Illu* the fulfillment of “both national-political and national-economic objectives” (Boyer 2001: 22).

Taking Boyer’s account as a model, it becomes possible to read a similar tale in the marketing and positioning GLBJ engages in on account of its own brand of services in the pursuit of obtaining the business of local Chinese enterprises. In the section on business operations above, I note that a core principle of the agency is the production of high-quality creative work. Such a principle primarily manifests itself in the form of an outward declaration that the agency possesses the necessary type of elements (i.e., professional creative personnel) to meet the needs of those (i.e., clients) for the times (i.e., post-Mao/late-reforms/late-socialist China). And as also explained, this meeting of the ‘creative’ needs of clients, in particular local clients, is predicated on the notion of the conjoining of the best “talent” of the East and West in one place—a winning combination for a China betwixt and between a planned and a market economy state of affairs. Building into the “East meets West” theme mentioned throughout this chapter is also the specific way understandings about creativity at GLBJ play themselves out in relation to larger discourses about China as a creative space. In order to make explicit what I mean, I turn back once again to Boyer’s argument regarding *Super Illu*, “easterness,” and indexicality. As Boyer argues,

In the symbolic economy of western [German] public culture, “easterness is associated with negative ethnotypes of German national character, such as “docility,” “intolerance,” and a “lack of civil courage.” East Germans often are termed the “more German” Germans because of their supposedly stereotypical affinity for traditional German values, such as local-mindedness, reliability, lack of pretension, and cultural purity. All of these values are, significantly, reciprocal inversions of how West Germans prefer to situate their westernized cultural affinities for cosmopolitanism and competitive individuality (Boyer 2001: 15)

By all accounts, very similar arguments have been made about mainland China (Engardio 2005). To once again make use of Boyer’s phrasing, in the symbolic economy of the world of international relations and the global market system, China and “chineseness” are often associated with negative concepts such as “rigid,” “closed,” and “controlled,” with special terms like “the world’s workshop” and “cheap” directed specifically at China’s creative capabilities.

Many of these assessments of China and “chineseness” correspond to China’s recent socialist past as a country subject to authoritarian rule and to the output early on after the country’s re-opening in 1979 of low-quality mass consumer goods. However, it must be pointed out that another factor contributing to the poorness of Chinese goods has been, until recently, the very real lack of incentive (and therefore knowledge of what makes for a competitive product) to produce a good of comparable standard to that of more industrially advanced countries. As a result, the branded goods of many Chinese manufacturers suffer internationally, but perhaps more importantly domestically (Xin 2005; China Internet Information Center 2005). Seizing upon the opportunity China’s recent national and economic history has created for the country, GLBJ, like many advertising agencies (see Li 2006), look to the current

moment as an opportunity to help invert, to use Boyer's phrase, the problems in symbolic capital surrounding the corporate identities and goods of Chinese manufacturers.

The whole notion of creativity at play here—one implicated in the process and practice of branding—concerns the way advertising as a profession positions itself as a source and purveyor of the positively charged notion of creativity now valued and promoted by China's government as a means of social development and cultural production. Professionals at GLBJ see it as their duty to help coax the concealed creativity of a client out through application of the process described above as the "Total" Approach. However, in reality, no such coaxing takes place, and it is actually on the basis of the combination or recombination of pre-existing ideas, symbols, beliefs, and values that a brand comes into being (Mazzarella 2003a). A good example of which I speak concerns discussions I had with employees about their opinions about the "importance of creativity" in Chinese advertising, which became a reoccurring theme of its own during my research. Below is an excerpt from an interview conducted with one of the local account planners on this issue. The question initiating our discussion concerns the way "creativity" is managed by his various clients, since he works on accounts related to both international and domestic clients.

Kimberly: What are the biggest challenges you face between working with international and local clients?

Account Planner: There are two methods (*liang ge banfa*) which use experience. First, local clients tend to rely on their own opinion of the market, while [second] internationals use market research to find out what consumers like and dislike. It is really difficult to satisfy local clients, and the agency is often not given enough time, too much time spent arguing and that this makes it difficult to be efficient...

Account Planner: It is hard to service local clients because they don't do a good job in separating communication and business plans...it is often the case that the agency will get a brief which talks about *creative effectiveness*, but not *creative quality*.

Kimberly: Why is this a problem?

Account Planner: [Because] the client sees the agency as a "talent/genius" (*tiancai*).

Account Planner: But then this is also the fault of GLBJ, because everything is about brands ...which includes product, price, channel, everything is brand, and local clients see brand as a short-term solution.

Account Planner: A big challenge facing creativity is the lack of resources, unclear client briefs... lacking an understanding of consumer audience, and GLBJ does not have a consumer database, [if so] it would make my job easier, help one to focus. GLBJ doesn't write down experiences. It should be one consumer's buying journey.

Kimberly: What do you mean?

Account Planner: Lifestyle of student, young white/blue collar.

Account Planner: Local clients don't like to do research, they think they know, but internationals always do research.

Kimberly: What do you mean by "locals think they know"?

Account Planner: They think they know Chinese because they are Chinese.

Account Planner: One of my clients [the local consumer electronics company mentioned above] is the most difficult client to service, because [it] is too big, too many products, business problem not clear, so communication problem not clear, but this is not the same as a communication challenge. To the client, the result is important, not so much the creative idea.

Clearly, employees like this account planner viewed “being creative” as an important dimension of the vitality of Chinese companies. And yet looking at this excerpt, something which also comes across that I became acutely aware of while at GLBJ, was the fact that much of what was said about Chinese creativity (especially the negative comments) went beyond the rhetoric of advertising or marketing as a business (Applbaum 2004). As the account planner states, part of the problem with creativity came from GLBJ itself, from the fact that the agency’s emphasis on branding did not always meet up with local conceptualizations of the concept and uses. Many of these utterances about the state of marketing creativity, or the advertising and branding work that is the focus of GLBJ’s practice, were also sincere comments about recognizing an “as-yet” to emerge potential of a client. Such was the case while speaking with a local business director, who explained that even though many Chinese brands currently lack originality, that situation is beginning to change as China’s market matures and clients and companies realize the value of what being creative can do, but until then, doing good work is what it will take to convince clients of this need.

Conclusion

It is through the perspective of an anthropologist as cultural observer moving through and becoming situated in a specific working environment—in this case an observer of two distinctive types of cultures, one Chinese and one corporate—that I analyzed the advertising agency that served as my primary fieldsite. Drawing on data recorded in my fieldnotes and from interviews conducted with employees of GLBJ, I attempted to reconstruct the nature of this environment according to a theme of “East meets West,” an analytical construction employed to help denote the various sources of cultural influence shaping the field of contemporary Chinese advertising.

Specifically, “East meets West” served as a framework to explain the nature of GLBJ’s organizational structure, in particular the origin of the ideas undergirding its management, hiring, and business practices, and the manner in which those ideas played themselves out in the space occupied by this agency in Beijing. In the course of these discussions, attention was also given to the influence larger political decisions affecting China have had on advertising in China, and their subsequent affect on GLBJ. Additionally, I engaged in a discussion of creativity in relation to the way GLBJ’s top-down management style worked to define the meaning of creativity for the agency.

Because branding constitutes the focus of later chapters in the dissertation, specifically Chapter Five and part of Chapter Six, I refrained from going into a detailed analysis of any particular example of branding here, and instead concentrated on orienting readers to how GLBJ engaged in the practice in general. In particular, I referred to the various ideologies about economic growth and social change in China that influenced employee attitudes about the work they did., with the most important of these ideologies concerning notions of what made an agency, and hence the individuals who work there, creative. In the next chapter I continue my analysis of creativity as a tool associated with China’s modernization, focusing specifically on the cultural and political reasons (both domestic and international) now leading China’s current government to seek to associate China with the identity of “innovation nation”.

CHAPTER THREE:

CHINA, KNOWLEDGE, AND THE PURSUIT OF MODERNITY

“To Build an Innovation-Oriented Nation”

On 9 January 2006, a conference on the issues of science and technology opened in Beijing at the Great Hall of the People. Spanning the course of three days, the conference, officially billed as the “Fourth National Conference on Science and Technology,” was given extensive coverage in the Chinese Communist Party organ *People’s Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*). According to articles published in the online English edition of the newspaper during this time, the conference, which served as an official coming together of members of China’s highest political offices—the Chinese Communist Party’s Central Committee and the State Council—marked the “first of its kind in a decade” to take place. In the articles, the conference is described to readers as holding significance because of emphasis placed by conference speakers on the “strategic importance” of “innovation” for China, as the country continues its efforts to develop into an industrially-advanced and socially modern nation. One speech in particular—President Hu Jintao’s keynote address—was singled out in the newspaper’s coverage of the event, with his address explained as setting the overall tone for the conference. An editorial from the opening day carried an excerpt from President Hu’s speech, and quoted him as saying:

Innovation is the core of the nation’s competitiveness and the strategic motif of China’s future science and technological development. The practice of the world’s science and technological development shows that only with [a] strong capacity for innovation, can a country win in the international competition...Real core technologies cannot be purchased but can only be

achieved by innovation, which should be given priority in the whole scientific and technological work. Raising the capability of innovation must center on serving economic and social development and try best to tackle major issues in the field which hamper[s] economic and social development. Technologies of energy resources, water resources and environmental protection should be developed as priorities...Intellectual property rights of key techniques in equipment manufacturing and information industries should be regarded as breakthrough points in raising competitiveness; boosting manufacturing and information industries, raising agricultural production capacity, making breakthroughs in energy exploration, technologies of energy-saving and clean energy resources and optimizing energy structure should be goals to achieve in [the] scientific and technological development;

The goals also include developing [China's] recycling economy, making breakthroughs in pharmacy and key medical equipment, developing technologies for national defense, and building up advanced scientist groups, research institutions and enterprises. To encourage the innovation vitality of the entire society and turn[ing] scientific and technological achievements into productive forces are important tasks of building up an innovation-oriented country. The government will play a leading role in the scientific and technological innovation, while the basic role of market will be given a full play in the allocation of scientific and technological resources...

According to the articles in which these statements appear,¹⁸ the way China will become innovative is through the reformation of current technological, cultural,

¹⁸ "China outlines Strategic Tasks for Building Innovation-Oriented Country" *People's Daily* (online edition). 9 January 2006; "Try to Build an Innovation-Oriented Nation" *People's Daily* (online edition). 10 January 2006; "Innovation 'Holds Key to Progress'," *People's Daily* (online edition). 10 January 2006; "Chinese Premier Calls for Building Innovation-Oriented Country," *People's Daily* (online edition). 12 January 2006; "Innovation 'Boosts National Strength'," *People's Daily* (online edition). 12 January 2006. <http://english.people.com.cn>. Accessed 8 February 2006.

financial, economic, legal, and environmental practices, including government-sponsored encouragement and fostering of “local talents,” with the aim of helping China “leapfrog” along the path of development into the most advanced forms scientific and technological developments have so far taken humanity. Also included in the newspaper’s editorial coverage of the conference is mention of a speech given by Premier Wen Jiabao, who, echoing President Hu, is quoted as also declaring the necessity of innovation for China’s future economic and social growth and the need for citizens to embrace this concept into their lives. As a means of rounding out coverage, attention is also given to speeches made by invited “experts”—Chinese university professors and business leaders, as well as some brief discussion of the awarding of two national awards for science and technology.¹⁹ The inclusion of these other happenings, the giving of awards in particular, is explained as corresponding to the country’s interest in recognizing its homegrown talent in innovation, as “self-reliance in innovation,” a component of Hu, Wen’s and a number of other speeches, is highlighted as one of the key objectives for which China is to aspire.

Introduction

As made obvious by the articles cited, innovation constitutes a primary component of China’s current development strategy. This strategy, as readers are told, has been adopted by the government in order to help China achieve the goal of self-sufficiency in determining the outcome of its transformation from an underdeveloped to a technologically and culturally advanced nation. And in order to accomplish this

¹⁹ These awards correspond to what readers might think of as China’s own version of the Noble Prize in various subject areas related to science and scientific research. The awards given in 2006 were awarded in the fields of physics and biology, to two octogenarian scientists responsible for “breakthroughs” in their fields.

transition, Chinese citizens must take it upon themselves to become leaders in both a plethora, and also across a wide range, of research field and practices.

I draw attention to this matter for the single issue of the language used, in particular in President Hu Jintao's address, to frame the case for why China must aspire for "innovation-oriented nation" status. What is striking about this language is how it corresponds to a broader international discourse on the future of national, societal, and cultural development produced by supranational institutions like the World Bank, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Hornidge 2007). While identified with Hu and a number of other government officials and loyal Party members, both the specific ideas surrounding innovation as a tool of development and the manner for carrying out this process cannot, as suggested by the articles, be attributed to the Party alone. On the contrary, what must be understood is how the specific notions surrounding the use of innovation, and its input, creativity, as a development tool now in vogue in Chinese political, social, and cultural discourse, have their roots in a long-standing conversation in China between China and the West, concerning Chinese national character and modernity.

My focus in this chapter pertains to an analysis of the social vision at the center of contemporary debates about modernity in China. In the following sections, I examine how this vision corresponds to understandings and efforts by the Communist Party to develop China into a society where "knowledge" serves as the basis of economic and social growth. But rather than accept its official narrative at face value, I instead examine how understandings of China as modern, on the basis of being an object of contemporary discourse surrounding "knowledge" and "innovation" as tools of development, are brought into existence. To make this argument I rely on recent sociological and anthropological studies of "development," and concentrate on a

timeline of events and actions which account for the coming about of this vision. In doing so, I draw into conversation ideas and strands of thought produced about China by external development entities that have been taken back up by the government as a way of knowing about the Chinese cultural self.

Viewing the Self as an Object of Development

Reporting on “Progress”

In September 2001, the World Bank Institute (WBI)—the academic research arm of the World Bank—published a report entitled *China and the Knowledge Economy: Seizing the 21st Century*. Written in the Foreword to the report is the following,

...to prosper in this new era, China must welcome the knowledge revolution and make effective use of knowledge in its agricultural and industrial sectors, and especially in developing its service industry. China also needs to manage the transition to an environmentally sustainable economy that better utilizes its relatively limited natural resources.

This book outlines the main challenges that China faces in its future development, and the importance of shifting from a factor-based to a knowledge-based development strategy. It presents a long term strategy for China that integrates knowledge-related policy components, improving relevant economic incentives and institutions, upgrading the education and training system, building the information infrastructure, and strengthening the innovation and research system...

To take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity, the book recommends that the government withdraw further from hands-on management of the economy and take on

a new role—that of an *architect of appropriate institutions and provider of incentives* to establish a new socialist market economy based on knowledge (Thomas and Kassum 2001: iii; emphasis mine).

The report, as noted by its authors Carl J. Dahlman and Jean-Eric Aubert, constitutes a “significantly expanded and analytically enriched version” of an earlier World Bank Institute study commissioned by the Chinese government in 2000 (Dahlman and Aubert 2001: v).²⁰ Over the course of ten chapters, readers encounter a detailed critique of the approach to development utilized by the Chinese government since 1979, the official opening of China’s reform period, and its relation to “knowledge-based” development. According to the authors, while the socio-economic growth achieved by China since 1979, especially “in increasing welfare and reducing poverty are unparalleled,” such progress is unsustainable without “major changes in...development strategy” (Dahlman and Aubert 2001: xv).

Beginning in 1979, China’s central government began a practice whereby it agreed to allow foreign investment in its markets as a means to modernize. Such a practice emerged shortly following a chaotic period marked by the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), during which the central government experimented with a program of self-led industrialization as a means of alternative modernization.²¹ Proving disastrous to China’s economy and the

²⁰ Vinod Thomas and Jemal-ud-din Kassum are listed, respectively, as the Vice-President of the World Bank Institute and the Vice President of East Asia and Pacific Region, World Bank for the period during which this report was published. The name of the earlier report, what is termed an “Executive Summary” by Dahlman and Aubert, goes by the name of “China’s Development Strategy: The Knowledge and Innovation Perspective”.

²¹ The Great Leap Forward is the name generally given to the first three years of what should have been China’s Second Five Year Plan, but is best known as socialist China’s most radical attempt to leap-frog into a state of advanced industrial development, and hence become modern, since the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949. In an article dating from 1964, the economist Choh-Ming Li explained how development plans conceived on the basis of revolutionary ideology undermined the smooth operation of Chinese society. As he pointed out, economic and social goals originally outlined as part of a would-be Second Five-Year Plan, quickly gave way to idealism spurred on by signs that China was becoming self-sufficient in its aims to industrialize society. This idealism proved harmful to China, largely because of its prevention of accurate and realizable planning.

population's general welfare, the government rapidly abandoned its policies of autonomous industrialization following the deaths of Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou Enlai in 1976, in favor of a new policy orientation emphasizing "mutual exchange" with industrially advanced western nations (Kliver 1996; Misra 1998). This investment has taken a number of diverse forms, but most commonly that of capital goods transfer (technology and machinery needed for manufacturing) and foreign direct investment (dollars, largely from overseas Chinese investors) (Dahlman and Aubert 2001). Yet as Dahlman and Aubert point out, reliance on this model in the long run is untenable, considering that both what counts as "the modern" in terms of society and how "modernity" as a cultural trait is achieved, has changed. The new

...except for the brief statement of intentions and output targets in September 1956 and a few subsequently revised target figures, there has not been any formulation of a Five-Year Plan for the period 1958-1962. The Great Leap Forward made any long-term planning—or any planning, for that matter—impossible, and the deepening of the agricultural crisis since 1959 has rendered the annual plans for the following three years entirely ad hoc affairs. There has never been a Second Five-Year Plan in any real sense of the term (Li 1964: 12; emphasis mine)

The way in which the above mention idealism affected planning activities was through the implementation of a practice known as decentralization. Decentralization was a process by which the central government sought to secure its claims to leadership by granting individual committees and cadres authority to run their units (enterprises) independent of any oversight from the Party. To once again quote from Li: "Decentralization provided the party committees in enterprises with the opportunity to take over management by shoving the professionals aside—with disastrous results (ibid: 26)." The idea urging on this decision was the belief that doing so constituted the realization of a popular democracy, when in fact it only fostered poor decision-making because no clear directions underscored the productive activities of enterprises. Rather than mirror the ideology on which it was based, decentralization instead destroyed the ability of enterprises to meet the actual nutritional and material needs of society. Over-production of capital goods moved forward at pace simultaneously with the eradication of a market system to absorb them, as work units, responding to official calls to up industrial production, ignored the social reality around them.

China's problems of developing through the pursuit of the ideal socialist state did not, however, end with the Great Leap Forward. Although important lessons were learned from this experiment, revolutionary struggle as the foundation of China's social development was not abandoned. In fact, the practice of foregrounding the making of revolution as the foundation of modern society continued and reached its climax during the period known as the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976. The Cultural Revolution, according to Edward Freidman, represented a final push by Mao to realize fundamental communism in China (Freidman 1987). Freidman echoes what many China scholars have said about the chaos and total breakdown of Chinese society in this period, most importantly the fact that pursuit of the perfect socialist state equaled more institutionalized corruption and oppression than ever found in capitalist societies.

objective of states, they argue, concerns the construction of societies governed by the free-flow of “knowledge,” the new key resource for economic growth (UNESCO World Report 2005; World Bank Institute 2007). As Dahlman and Aubert explain, “knowledge” takes on this role as the consequence of history—as *shared* human history—produced as a result of innovations and advancements in science and technology, primarily those supporting communication. “A major new element on the international front is the speed of change in producing and disseminating knowledge—possible because of greater scientific understanding and rapid advances in information and communications technologies (ICTs)” (Dahlman and Aubert 2001: 29).

In December 2001, China officially acceded to membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), two months following the publication of the WBI report. In his book *Created in China: The Great New Leap Forward*, media studies scholar Michael Keane (2008), argues that China’s pursuit of WTO membership hinged on government interests in “catching up” with the West (Keane 2007: 30). But as others, such as foreign journalists, political analysts, and the Chinese government itself have noted, the reason for China’s joining stemmed mainly from the recognition that only through greater interaction in the global economy could the economic and social growth experienced by the country to that point continue (Frost 2002).²² This situation, brought about by the stipulation in China’s WTO agreement, states that for the first fifteen years of membership, China be treated as a non-market economy.²³ But like a number of others, Keane also explains that an important force encouraging

²² “China Implements WTO Promises Steadily,” *People’s Daily* (online edition). 10 April 2002. <http://www.english.peopledaily.com.cn>. Accessed 9 February 2006.

²³ “Non-Market WTO Clause Ups Dumping Charges,” *People’s Daily* (online edition). 2 December 2003. <http://www.english.peopledaily.com.cn>. Accessed 8 April 2007.

this decision also had to do with China's identification as the "world's workshop" (Ngai 2006; Engardio 2005; Powell 2005; Wang et al. 2005).

As noted by Keane as well as the WBI report, most of China's economic growth is the result of heavy investment in low-cost manufacturing, with the result being that China possesses few patents on the goods produced in its factories. While acceptance of the role of global goods assembler has greatly benefited the country's transformation, it has also positioned China in a sort of ontological quagmire, leading to questions arising from both within and without the country over whether China can innovate and create (Powell 2005; Atuahene-Gima 2006). *China and the Knowledge Economy* was produced by the WBI on the behalf of China's central government. As the report's intended audience, it conveys information about the country and its society that, according to the authors, the government presumably wants to hear. This report's existence is neither forced nor unwelcome. Yet what is rather unexpected is the report's focus on the activities of other countries, especially western, capitalist democracies, as the basis of its assessment of China's current strengths and weaknesses.

What I refer to is the use by Dahlman and Aubert of an evaluation strategy, called the Knowledge Assessment Methodology, to judge China as modern. Comprised of a series of "scorecards," this methodology measures the degree to which a country has transformed into a "knowledge economy" in relation to four key "pillars". The "pillars" in question refer to,

1. An economic and institutional regime that provides incentives for the effective use of existing knowledge and the creation of new knowledge and entrepreneurship;
2. An educated and skilled population that can create and use knowledge;

3. A dynamic information infrastructure that can facilitate the effective communication, dissemination, and processing of information;
4. An effective innovation system where enterprises, research centers, universities and other organizations interact effectively to create and diffuse technologies using the growing stock of domestic and global knowledge (Dahlman and Aubert 2001: 2).

The origin of this method is the World Bank itself, but it is constructed on the basis of a collective body of case studies and statistical data conducted and collected by field agents within the organization, as well as by other development organization, especially UNESCO. China, as readers of the report learn, receives assessments varying widely from praise to near chastisement. For example, in relation to pillar number two, the production of an educated and skilled population capable of creating, the authors write,

On the basic scorecard, China does fairly well on adult illiteracy for its per capita income. *But* it does less well on secondary enrollment rates, and even more poorly on tertiary enrollment rates—a major concern because higher education is important for making efficient use of knowledge. China also has to considerably expand and modernize its education system and reform the ministry of education in order to provide an efficient incentive structure, both for educators as well as [the] students...(Dahlman and Aubert 2001: 41; emphasis mine).

Whereas in relation to pillar number four:

China is average in its use of direct foreign investment as a way of obtaining global knowledge. *But* it does poorly in its domestic R&D and in the

technological intensity of its exports (Dahlman and Aubert 2001: 43; emphasis mine).

Such is the case regarding China's progress in relation to each of the four pillars outlined above. In each instance China starts off with a positive assessment, only to quickly have that assessment turn negative. The rationale for this argument for "knowledge" in the report stems from the authors' emphasis on identifying for China's central government new and important factors for growth, both those yet unknown and those already in place, but underutilized. However, by placing their discussion of "knowledge as a tool for development" in the context of the economic shift in global market relations, Dahlman and Aubert make it clear that the history they refer to is in fact a recent one with its origins in the West. But, before addressing how these assessments relate to the notion of modernity argued for through the report's use of the term knowledge, it is first necessary to know what, in fact were the steps taken by China's central government toward the construction of a knowledge-based economy at the time of the report's writing.

The Knowledge Innovation Program (KIP)

In 1997, former Chinese president Jiang Zemin, speaking before members of the Chinese Communist Party, commissioned the undertaking and establishment of a study and pilot program on China's innovation capabilities. The commission was granted to the Chinese Academy of Sciences, a party think tank located in Beijing not far from Tiananmen Square. A brief discussion of the origins of the study and its undertaking, officially known as the Knowledge Innovation Program (KIP) (*zhishi chuangxin gongcheng*) appears on the Academy's website:²⁴

²⁴ <http://www.cas.cn>

In the second half of 1997, CAS submitted to the Party Central Committee and the State Council a report, “Strive to Build Up a national Innovation System [sic] to Meet the Era of Knowledge-Based Economy.” In February of 1998, Chinese President Jiang Zeming [sic] gave his instruction in reply: “Both the knowledge-based economy and innovation consciousness are vital to the development of our country in the 21st century. The financial downturn in Southeast Asia may slow down the development of conventional industries, but it may also provide an opportune chance for the reorganization of the industrial structure. The Chinese Academy of Sciences has made some proposals, and also has a research team. I think support should be given to the Academy to work out some pilot projects, advancing one step ahead of others, in an effort to build up our own innovation system. On 9th June 1998 [sic], the first meeting of the Leading Group for Science & Education under the State Council was convened to ratify the implementation of the CAS Pilot Project of the National Innovation Program (KIP). In June 1998, the CAS Pilot Project was formally launched.^{25,26}

The KIP represents what is known as a national innovation strategy (Keane 2007: 82), and comprised part of what the Chinese Academy of Sciences describes as China’s “National Innovation System,” an action according to Keane, undertaken in “response to the rising tide of international reports about knowledge-based economies, innovation as competitive advantage, and shift in the world economy from goods to services that has seen much of the routine production of commodities outsourced to

²⁵ <http://www.cas.cn>. Access date 25 March 2008.

²⁶ I point out the translated nature of this statement on purpose, as no such statement appears on the Chinese Academy of Science’s Chinese-version website. Even after conducting a keyword search of the phrase “knowledge innovation project” (*zhishi chuangxin gongcheng*) no pages denoting the same statement turned up. The existence of this statement in English only reinforces the idea that the Party’s interest in discourse on innovation and knowledge economy rests in being able to lay claim to a legitimate discourse on how China is developing and under whose (or what) guiding influence, since more foreign visitors to the site will (presumably) be able to read English than Chinese

the newly industrialized world” (Keane 2007: 61). Launched simultaneously with the KIP, the National Innovation System is discussed as “composed of institutions involved in knowledge innovation and technology innovation,” where “knowledge innovation [is] netted with...state research institutions and key universities,” and “technology innovation...with industrial enterprises” (CAS website).

In its design, the KIP outlined key areas of interest for the government to pursue research within over the period of thirteen years (1998-2010), broken up into three key “phases,” with the ultimate goal of transforming China into an “innovation” nation by 2010. The first phase of the plan commenced in June 1998, as indicated by the statement on the Academy’s website, and lasted until 2001. Known as the “Initial Phase,” this first stage focused on reorganization of the objectives and operations (literally, the management and organizational structure) of the Academy, which, as explained on its website, was to serve as a model of reform for other state-run/affiliated institutions. Objectives listed in relation to the first phase emphasized science and technology reform, in particular the procurement of updated machinery to assist scientists in their work, identifying the initial stage as one of foundation building.

The second phase of the project, outlined by the KIP and referred to as “Phase of All-Round Implementation,” covered the years 2001-2005, a period of time which overlapped with the Tenth Five Year Plan. During this phase, the KIP emphasized continued, but intensified, investment in science and technology, especially innovation in science and technology focused on “fundamental research” in “strategic areas such as nano science [*sic*] and technology, quantum information, intelligent information processing, developmental biology and genetics,” to name just a few.²⁷

²⁷ For a complete listing of research objectives appearing under the topics of fundamental and strategic high-tech research, see <http://www.cas.cn>, “Main Goals for the Phase of All-Round Implementation of the KIP Pilot Project.”

Also emphasized under this category was “strategic high –tech research” in areas such as “biochips,” “mini satellite technology,” and “green chemical industry and environmental technology;” S&T for resources and environment,” and “agricultural high technologies and population and health care”.

Others categories named under the second phase included “talent training and contingent building,” “opening-up and cooperation”—referring to the establishment of international partnerships and establishment of research centers within China to carry out research on the topics listed above,” “promotion of technology transfer –referring to the establishment of links between industry and academy,” “development of innovative culture”—referring to the “strengthen[ing] [of] the institution of rules and eregulations” and “construction of S&T infrastructure”—(which referred to the construction of a network of interlinked campuses within the Academy’s structure (KIP, “Construction of China’s national Innovation System”).

And finally, the last and final phase of the program, named the “Phase of Optimization,” commenced in 2006, overlapping with China’s most recent five-year plan. Explained by the Academy as building upon ideas linking knowledge, innovation and development, this phase, even more than its predecessors, was undertaken with the intention of transforming thinking and practice in China away from older models of industrialization to the most current. Lasting until 2010, its focus pertains to the implementation of the outcome of the research initiatives of the first two phases, with the purpose of demonstrating how the government has taken the lead in developing China into an innovation nation.

Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001-2005)

Above I made mention of an overlap between the national innovation strategy developed by the government, and the structure and content of the Tenth Five-Year

Plan (*shi ge wu nian jihua*). The relationship of the Tenth Five-Year Plan to the development of the Chinese government's pursuit of the knowledge economy model becomes obvious through the Plan's emphasis on the use, and build up, of a "knowledge infrastructure" based on information and communication technologies. This document provides a clearer picture of the structural characteristics of the government's vision of the future than the KIP. Like earlier plans, the Tenth Five-Year Plan announced the official path of economic development to be taken by China. In effect from 2001-2005, the Tenth Five-year Plan named the "informatization" (*xinxihua*) of the country as the state (and society's) primary development objective through heavy investment in telecommunications technology, like broadband and mobile phone networks.

Rationalized by the government as a necessary ingredient for economic growth, these actions dovetail with what development sociologist Anna-Katharina Hornidge has argued in the case of government involvement in national development in Germany and Singapore (Hornidge 2007). According to Hornidge, these governments adopted strategies of informatization as a way of realizing aims of improving the lives of their citizens. Yet as she also argues, such actions must also be understood as serving to consolidate a government's claim to power and influence in society. In regard to this observation Hornidge writes,

In both countries...the vision of an unstoppably emerging k-society²⁸ was...drawn to justify economically focused government programmes, action plans and initiatives, that were said to monitor, guide and guard this apparent development. By doing so, it was actually these programmes and action plans

²⁸ The term "k-society" is a shorthand version of a concept that Hornidge refers to as containing the meaning of information society, knowledge society, and knowledge-based economy. This definition appears in the introduction to her work *Knowledge Society: Vision and Social Construction of Reality in Germany and Singapore* (2007: 1), in the context of a broader discussion of the various terms used over the past three decades to talk about the nature and form of advanced (i.e., "post") industrial society.

that fostered ICT development and the production, dissemination and economic exploitation of knowledge and information...It was these programmes that brought about the envisioned and, often described as unstoppably emerging[,] k-society into existence. Economy-focused politics were therefore justified with the vision of a self-emerging k-society. This vision, originally first created by members of the scientific community...was strengthened and spread further by the government programmes and action plans using it as a form of justification. These programmes strengthen this vision by identifying apparent indicators for the rise of a k-society and spread it further in order to legitimise their own existence (Hornidge 2007: 151).

While a number of reasons for pursuing these ends through the Tenth Five-Year Plan appear in the Plan itself, the most pressing remained China's economic productivity and ability to be competitive, an issue Keane argues has long characterized reform thinking within the government.²⁹ For example,

Deng Xiaoping made surplus and industrialisation primary development strategies. The 'four modernisations'—agriculture, industry, science and technology, and the military—reflected the national obsession with productivity. The focus on industry was intended to compensate for the low productivity of agriculture, which employed 70 percent of the nation's population at the time [the] reforms began (citing Chesneaux 1979). Supported by pragmatic reformers—Zhao Ziyang in the 1980s and Zhu Rongji in the

²⁹ The Tenth Five-year Plan lists these reasons as follows in the opening section of discussion of the information industry (sections 1.2 and 1.3), each in one way related to the idea of catching up and overtaking other nations as a key influencer and leader in the world:

1. The information industry has become the strategic industry in many countries in order to establish technological, economic and military authority in the world;
2. The development of the information industry has become the driver of economic growth and the basis of productivity enhancement in many countries;
3. The popularity and use of information technology and extensive use of information products will transform social production and lifestyle.

1990s—Deng took the prognosis of inefficiency and non-competitiveness seriously and implemented strategies to transform the welfare state model, the so-called ‘iron rice bowl mentality’—although without engaging in the kind of economic shock therapy policies that characterized the Soviet economy post-1989 (citing Mar and Richter 2003) (Keane 2007: 60).³⁰

In the context of the Tenth Five-Year Plan, this reasoning appeared as follows,

The first five to ten years of [the] 21st century is an important period for our national economic and social development. It is also a crucial time for the rapid development of the information industry. Rapid advancement of [,] and keen market competition in [,] the global information industry and information technology brings a valuable opportunity for our information industry, but on the other hand, it brings about a great challenge...Putting effort into promoting national economic and social informatization is a strategic action in the fulfillment of the whole modernization construction plan. It aims at using informatization to promote industrialization and actualize the expeditious development in productivity.

The turn toward investment in information and communication technologies as a new resource for economic productivity was also, as stated above, connected to the emphasis on low-cost manufacturing in the country. And because theories connected to the idea of “informatization” argued that such a step could improve a nation’s output by speeding up the process by which “knowledge” can be communicated, promoting ICT infrastructure construction as a path to modernity was given precedence by the central government.³¹

³⁰ The “Four Modernizations” is the categorical name given to the objectives of modernization envisioned as occurring by Deng Xiaoping and his backers in the Communist Party at the beginning of the economic reform era.

³¹ “Foreword” in *Summary of the Tenth Five-year Plan (2001-2005)—Information Industry*. Ministry of Information Industry. Beijing, PRC.

The Origins of an Ideal: Knowledge as a Development Tool

The idea of using “knowledge” as a development tool has its roots in a sociological body of thought about the future of advanced industrial society, in particular the work of Daniel Bell and Peter Drucker. In 1974, Daniel Bell, a Harvard sociologist, published a book entitled *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society: a Venture in Forecasting*. In this book, Bell put forth a theory concerning the nature of change in industrial society. Taking as his foundation transformations occurring in post-World War II American society due to advances in computers and communications technology, Bell argued the idea that because of these advances, society’s social structure has, and will, invariably change. In his estimation, the way in which industrial society has and will change coincides with shifts in the nature of the “roles” played in society by government and non-government actors (Bell 1974:13). Encouraging this shift in society is the economy, imagined in Bell’s work as a specific sphere in which basic social relations are formed and defined.

In developing his theory on post-industrial society, Bell was clearly influenced by thinkers associated with “grand social theory” (Appadurai 1996: 3), who, like Marx, envisioned a connection between workers, the product of their labor, and the betterment of society. Bell connected these three things via his focus on the importance of the contributions white collar workers (and, consequently, occupations) have, and can make, to the growth of industrial society. As a result, it is in this context that he defines the idea of knowledge as a resource for development. In a section on knowledge and development in society, Bell defined his use of knowledge as,

...that which is objectively known, an *intellectual property*, attached to a name or a group of names and certified by copyright or some other form of social recognition...This knowledge is paid for...it is subject to a judgment by the market, by administrative or political decisions of superiors, or by peers as to

the worth of the result, and as to its claim on social resources, where such claims are made. In this sense, knowledge is part of the social overhead investment of society...(Bell 1974: 176; emphasis in original).

Bell develops this definition of “knowledge” upon rejecting earlier formulations of the role given to knowledge in socio-economic growth offered by economists, not because of their rightness or wrongness, but because of what he viewed as their overemphasis on the sociology of the concept (Bell 1973: 176). To Bell, understanding knowledge as a particular sort of general social resource meant focusing on its applicability to change and empower its owner/originator, and it is precisely this definition of knowledge, as “objectively known...intellectual property,” that underscores the use of the term “knowledge” in the World Bank Institute’s report on China. Even though the specifics of the language differ, many of the ideas proposed by Bell as regarding the “coming” into being of post-industrial society can be recognized in the report’s recommendations to the government. Specifically related to this argument is the idea that China’s government must transform its role in society from being “hands-on,” which many western observers/critics of China’s economic transition, including the development community the central government has turned to for help, see as a major problem in China’s efforts to modernize, to an “architect and provider,” and the call for the state to make a greater effort to promote innovation and creativity.

Yet Bell is not alone in formulating the prescriptions for social growth that serve as the basis of the development community’s discourse on knowledge. Also factoring in is the work of Peter Drucker, who is best known for his theories on business and management (Drucker 1969; 1993; 1994). The most famous, and subsequently, important theory proposed by Drucker influencing development’s discourse on knowledge as a tool of development pertains to that on “knowledge

work” and “knowledge workers,” first introduced in his work *The Age of Discontinuity* (1969). Writing contemporaneously to Bell, Drucker builds on many of the ideas of the era concerning “knowledge,” in particular those of the economist Fritz Malchup (1962), who, prior to Bell, had made the connection between occupations and social change.

Appearing five years before Bell’s book, Drucker’s text defined knowledge as the “systematic organization of information and concepts” (Drucker 1969: 250), and while he does not narrow down his use of the term as Bell does, his meaning is clear. Specifically, Drucker argued that it is in fact “knowledge,” culled from multiple sources, that serves as the primary factor in generating economic growth in industrial society. Reaching this conclusion for similar reasons as Bell, Drucker also cited the influence of advancements in technology gained during and shortly after World War II as leading the shift to knowledge-centric work. And like Bell, Drucker also noted that it was not knowledge in the theoretical abstract which was valuable to society, but knowledge of an applied nature, that could be recognized for doing something *productive* for society.

‘Knowledge’ as normally considered by the ‘intellectual’ is something very different from knowledge in the context of a ‘knowledge economy’ or of ‘knowledge work’. For the ‘intellectual’, knowledge is what is in a book. But as long as it is in the book, it is only ‘information’ if not mere ‘data’. *Only when a man applies the information to do something does it become knowledge*. Knowledge, like electricity or money, is a form of energy that exists only when doing work. The emergence of the knowledge economy is not, in other words, part of ‘intellectual history’ as it is normally conceived. It is part of the ‘history of technology’, which recounts how man puts tools to work. When the intellectual says ‘knowledge’ he usually thinks of something

new. But what matters in the ‘knowledge economy’ is whether knowledge, old or new, is applicable...What is relevant is the imagination and skill of whoever applies it, rather than the sophistication or newness of the information (Drucker 1969: 251).

Therefore, as a result of encountering Drucker’s argument about knowledge, it once again becomes possible to view the influence of this work in the World Bank Institute’s report, in particular in regard to the “need” for China to make better use of the knowledge to which it currently has access.

Destabilizing Development’s Discourse

So far in my discussion of China’s recent adoption of an innovation-oriented development strategy, attention has focused on describing this action in relation to domestic efforts and the existence of a series of World Bank Institute reports assessing the country’s progression towards becoming a knowledge economy. As explained, the notion of “knowledge economy” along with that of “knowledge” correspond to understandings of the nature of modern, i.e., post-industrial, society. In making this argument, I focused on happenings in China’s recent history that have contributed to this adjustment, while also taking into consideration the role of western social theory in shaping the development framework now turned to by China’s government. In keeping in line with my focus near the end of the previous section, in this section I once again consider the role of western social theory in shaping the development community’s discourse on knowledge and knowledge economies as formations of the modern.

My starting point in this discussion is Timothy Mitchells’ argument in his book *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (2002), in which he critiques our collectively received understandings of “the economy”. Specifically, it is

Mitchell's call for a re-analysis of social theory surrounding the idea of the economy as used in practice (especially development practice) that is of greatest relevance to my argument (Mitchell 2002: 3). According to Mitchell, contrary to popular belief, "the economy" is not a concept detached from culture, nor some abstract reality existing in the world waiting to be named. Rather, the "economy" is a product of rational, calculated thought about place and the governing of said place, with its origins in western colonialism (Mitchell 2002: 8-10). This conceptualization of the economy as the projection of rationalized cultural thought, rationalized in the sense of being made to appear natural and universal by various force, both "human and non-human" working in concert with one another, emerges from Mitchell's tracing of the meaning of "economy" over time. Pointing out that our current usage of the term, that of "a self-contained, internally dynamic, and statistically measurable sphere of social action, scientific analysis, and political regulation," (Mitchell 2002: 4) stems from the mid-20th century, Mitchell states,

No political economist of the eighteenth or nineteenth century wrote about an object called "the economy". The term "economy" in that period carried the older meaning of "thrift," and in a larger sense referred to the proper husbanding of resources and the intelligent management of their calculation. The classical political economists expanded that meaning to refer to this proper management at the level of the political order. They used it in ways similar to the term "government," in the sense Foucault explores. "Political economy" was concerned not with the politics of an economy, but with the proper economy of a polity" (Mitchell 2002: 4)

With this understanding in hand, Mitchell then proceeds to analyze how Egypt, as an object of "global" knowledge about the economy has been shaped, and how various

segments of the Egyptian population have come to view themselves as social agents in this process.

Noting how much of this view is the product of development “expertise,” Mitchell then breaks down the manner in which such a situation is achieved. In doing so, Mitchell continues to build on a project partially introduced in anthropology by James Ferguson in his analysis of “development” in Lesotho (Ferguson 1994). For it was Ferguson, through use of Foucault’s argument concerning the relationship of knowledge to power, that anthropologists first began critiquing how “development” makes its object (Escobar 1992; 1995). However, what most interests me in Mitchell’s work is his analysis of “expertise” as technical knowledge about events occurring in nature shaped by the actual production of those events, rather than as the reaction to those events after they have been completed (Mitchell 2002: 51-52).

Such a way of knowing the world is the product of how western colonialism, due to its foundations in Enlightenment thought about the power of human reason over nature (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). In other words, what Mitchell argues is that “expertise,” no matter how externally it appears to be positioned from the object to which it is applied, is in reality highly involved in the production of its object, and the reality corresponding to that object—be it the building of a dam, the eradication of mosquitoes, or the operation of a market economy. And because of the reality of how expertise works, this, in turn, also anchors it (expertise) to the way the power of certain actors in a society is formed and how that power is used.

Turning back to the matter of expertise described in the previous section, what Mitchell explains as taking place in relation to expertise bringing its object into being can be observed in the way the authors of the report talk about knowledge economy in China. By relying on a single methodology to evaluate the steps taken by the Chinese central government’s progression towards the realization of a knowledge-based

economy, the report naturalizes the origins of that strategy as something already achieved in multiple places and multiple times, when in fact the real model for the methodology is the particular cultural history of socio-economic development in post-World War II America. Such an understanding is possible, especially due to the relationships development discourse on knowledge economy draws between advances in computer and information technologies and shifts in occupational structure, both of which are specific moments tied the United State's rise in power and influence in the second half of the 20th century (Beniger 1986). This understanding can also be read out of the development community's adoption, usage, and definition of "knowledge" as a tool of development, which corresponds directly with Drucker's usage and rationalization of the term.

Therefore, the issue I press here is that the vision of a knowledge-based, innovation-oriented, technologically and culturally advanced future for Chinese is *not*, as both development and government discourse on the matter claim, the indigenous product of China's efforts alone. Instead, this vision has particular roots in the way culturally dominant forms of knowing about the world and one's place in it have traveled from the West outward. This form has traveled primarily through the networks of international development, which, as observed and critiqued by anthropologists, plays a major role in this process through the application of its so-called expertise.

But something that goes unnoticed in the narrative about China's pursuit of knowledge economy as a form of modernity is the role of a secondary discourse related to creativity that has also entered China, and that is also influencing the government's course of action. What I refer to is what is represented in the opening to this chapter by the businessmen present at the Fourth National Conference on Science and Technology. While dubbed in official reports as an important component, and

recognized to a certain degree, the influence of the business community on the nature of China's development is often also underplayed and largely made to take a role subordinate to that of the Party. Yet when the issue of the manner in which China's pursuit of becoming an "innovation-oriented nation" is looked at more closely, the nature and balance of the relationship between the government and the business sphere shifts dramatically. The issue of why this is so is something I address more fully in the next few chapters. But as a means of transitioning into that discussion, the next and final section of this chapter takes into consideration how the issue of China's long-standing pursuit of modernity comes to bear on this relationship.

Characterizing China's "Contradictory Consciousness"

The understanding that China's current development strategy and attendant policies have their origins in the context of a long-standing conversation with the West over China's ability to be modern arises from my reading of the work of Jean and John Comaroff and Lydia Liu (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Liu 1995). These scholars, while situated in different fields—anthropology and literary studies—adopt similar approaches to the study of modernity as a cultural trait. For example, in the second volume of their multi-volume work on the role of British protestant evangelical missionaries in the production of modern black South African cultural consciousness, the Comaroffs (1991), note how western cultural notions about the self, embedded in and transferred through missionary teaching of "the Gospel" by way of material practice (e.g., hygiene, dress), worked to "incorporate" Southern Tswana into a particular worldview (Comaroff and Comaroff. 1997). Yet even as they make this argument, the Comaroffs are quick to note that the process on which they focus is one of struggle, one which incorporated the participation of the Southern Tswana by

way of a combination of both resistance and capitulation to the cultural framework thrust upon them by missionaries.

...Colonization always provokes struggles...often tragically uneven ones—over power and meaning...it is a process of “challenge and riposte” often...too complex to be captured in simple equations of dominance and resistance, or, for that matter, by grand models of politics of imperialism or the economics of the modern world system (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: xi).

Writing in a different capacity and context than that of the Comaroffs, Lydia Liu makes a similar argument regarding China. In her seminal work on the issue of cultural modernity in China, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Liu 1995), Liu argues that notions of national cultural difference centered on the idea of modernity first entered China via Japan in the early 20th century. She writes, “the concept of national character has its origins in German Romanticism,” and “like the majority of Japanese neologisms brought into China at the turn of the twentieth century and afterwards, was first used by late Qing intellectuals to develop their own theory of the modern nation-state” (Liu 1995: 47-48).

Liu draws attention to this moment in Chinese history, the period immediately following China’s semi-colonization by Western forces, both military and cultural—because it was in this moment that the idea of modernity as a trait of strong, versus weak, nations entered China by way of translated text. These texts, written by white, western foreigners living in China about Chinese culture for western audiences re-entered China by way of Japanese translations of the works. Often derogatory and condescending of Chinese culture, such translations reached an “unintended audience” of Chinese readers, many of whom ironically embraced their negative discourse as

insight into the reasons why China had been unable to prevent the western incursion into their territory (Liu 1995: 48-51).

It is Liu's attention to this ironic embrace of western discourse over national character by Chinese intellectuals, which most contributes to my argument regarding China's current leadership's appropriation of innovation-driven development. As she explains, the introduction of western knowledge about China played a major role in shifting the nature of debate from one of comparison between China and the West, to one focused solely on China's culture and how it can be improved to be commensurately "like" the West. This shift coincided with what is known as the May Fourth period (roughly 1915-1921) and the New Culture movement (1920s), two politically-charged cultural responses to China's previously mentioned 19th century invasion by the western European and American forces.

The question of national character was thus effectively incorporated into the campaign against traditional culture...during the New Culture movement and the May Fourth period, whence it [internal Chinese debate over source of national character] turned practically into a near equivalent of *guomin liegen xing* (flawed national character), as we know it now [and] ...as *gaizao guomin xing* (transforming the national character) became the dominant theme in the meta-narrative of Chinese modernity (Liu 1995: 50).

However, even as this shift was taking place, Chinese intellectuals continued to debate how to harness and adapt this knowledge about the supposedly un-modern Chinese self for China's benefit. Never has this process been an easy one. The Chinese search for modernity has been rife with contradiction from the beginning in part, as Liu points out, because the original western discourse about China, in fact, never had to do with Chinese national culture. Instead, original commentary was focused on the nature of class relations in traditional, imperial Chinese society. It was the Chinese

themselves who transformed this critique into one of national cultural politics, thus destabilizing the idea that it was (or is) the superiority of western culture in its totality that led Chinese to question themselves as modern. For as Liu attests, the issue that truly deserves attention is not how Orientalist texts construct(ed) knowledge about China's modernity (see Said 1979), but how internal debate among Chinese has done so. And it is her attention to tensions among Chinese elites, especially the literary intellectuals like Lu Xun and Lao She focused on, to define both China's problems and solutions to those problems that is valuable to my analysis, because of how this focus speaks to the issue of power.

In contemporary China, current tensions exist between the Communist Party's claims to authority and its continuing relevance to a society rapidly turning capitalist. No longer is it possible to speak of the Party's clear hegemony in society, as other forces in the form of specific social actors like the advertising professionals and businessmen I discuss, now exist to challenge Party-produced ideas about culture and society. While politically the Party remains in charge, the same cannot be said regarding its role in other spheres, like cultural production. In describing the conference mentioned at the opening of this chapter, reporters noted the presence of invited speakers from business and academia. On the one hand, the presence of these individuals can be read as the simple participation of loyal Party members, but it is never stated in the articles if, in fact, that is what these individuals are. However, on the other hand, the presence of these individuals might also be read as part of the process through which the Party seeks to rectify some of its lost hegemony.

Such an understanding is suggested by Keane in his work regarding the emergence, in 2003, of a specific discourse on "creativity" within the business community that came to challenge the idea of "innovation" as a driver of development championed by the government, which he notes "was hardly understood in China at

the time” (Keane 2007: 84). For as the Comaroffs argue, “the hegemonic is constantly being made...,” and hegemony, contrary to much popular usage, is not one with ideology, but are in fact the specific cultural forms—“constructs and conventions”—that carry ideology (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 24-25).

When looking at the Chinese situation, most of the thinking about and actual practice of innovation arises from the field of business, a segment of society highly influenced by western ideas and practices concerning management. In addition, the conference was not the first to be held concerning the issue of China’s future path of development to incorporate members of the business community. In 2005, a number of conferences and meetings, such as a meeting held in May on the topic of the development of theory and practice of popular culture, brought together the state and private sectors (Jin et al. 2006). As indicated in the Preface to the *2004-2005 Year End Report on Cultural Innovation in China (2004-2005 Zhongguo Wenhua Chuangxin Niandu Baogao)*, the participation of members from the business community hinged on the insights on innovation as a mode of practice and thinking the Party could draw upon in formulating its own approach to the use of the concept in China.

Therefore, my argument is thus: rather than view the Party’s adoption of innovation-led development as a capitulation of the government to western pressures to change, this adoption must be viewed as an effort to appropriate and assert control over a mode of symbolic production over what now counts as “being modern” in the contemporary world for its actual producers (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 25). As doing so allows the Party to continue to lay claim to power, especially power over knowledge of what China is that it no longer solely possesses.

Conclusion

The preceding pages presented a discussion of the Chinese government's adoption of an innovation-led strategy of development, and the history surrounding that adoption. However, in telling this story, rather than produce a straightforward historical account of the process, I instead focused attention on the intricacies of the details—cultural, political, economic, and social scientific—that contributed to the shaping of the outcome of this process and its official narrative as I came to know of it during my fieldwork in 2005-06. In dissecting this narrative, in particular the impression given that such an undertaking as the promotion and development of knowledge-based economy is the sole product of government action, my aim has been to show how different concerns over modernity in China have worked to shape this process over time. In doing so, my intention has been to both provide background and lay the groundwork of what comes next in this dissertation, which is a look at the specific history of advertising in China, and how the resurrection of the practice by the state at the beginning of economic reforms, and the practice's development over the past thirty years, converges with the story I have begun to tell in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR:

ADVERTISING BETWEEN SOCIALISM AND CAPITALISM

“The Annual Meeting”

On a bright and chilly early spring day in late March, I, along with a large number of other employees, boarded a bus headed to a restaurant located in the northeast quadrant of the city. Our reason for traveling to the restaurant concerned the fact that it was there that GLBJ’s management had chosen to hold its annual meeting. As I would come to learn, this meeting was designed for members of the agency’s staff—primarily those in management positions—to air opinions and perspectives on the state of practice as carried out by the agency and broader profession more generally. This year’s meeting carried the theme of “mama haha,” a play on the Chinese word *mama huhu*, meaning “so so” or “mediocre”. Announcements in the form of posters had been up for weeks throughout the agency, and as the actual day of the meeting grew near, Human Resources sent out reminders to employees via email.

Once at the site, employees filed off the bus in order to check-in at a large table set up in front of the restaurant, as well as to collect a gift of a small, plastic toy dog provided by management to commemorate the event. During the time it took for this process to be completed, a number of employees took advantage of the situation to meet up and chat with friends. Some employees even used this moment to take pictures together in front of a large banner set up in front the restaurant with the agency’s name and meeting theme written on it. Just as the banner denoting the meeting’s theme hung outside, similar efforts to evoke the theme had been taken inside the restaurant. Long, thin banners made their way up the length of pillars which supported a second story, while a screen set up on a platform in the center of the

restaurant displayed a computer screen-saver with the phrase “mama haha” over and over as part of a whimsical configuration of cartoon characters and abstract shapes. The inclusion of the stage as part of the meeting’s set-up helped to facilitate presentations to be given by the eight speakers asked to give comments that day.

Over the course of close to four hours, speakers, ranging from the Vice-Chairman to a media planner invited from the media agency with which GLBJ partnered, took the stage in order to share allegories and films, pep talks and condemnations on how to be a better advertising practitioner. According to the Vice-Chairman, one accomplished this task by being confident in what one does, and recognizing that “strategy is god,” whereas for the General Manager, this was based on being “adaptive”. From the media planner, being a good advertising practitioner meant being “accountable” for one’s work by measuring the size of one’s audience as a way of putting creative thinking “into context,” and thinking beyond “gimmick” and “one-off ideas” when approaching one’s work. While for the head of planning, being a good advertising practitioner meant being clear and not vague as a way for making an argument for creativity amongst both clients and consumers.

Introduction

I draw attention to the episode of this meeting for the simple reason that it showcased what turned out to be an issue of general concern among advertising professionals during the time of my fieldwork. Practice, and the general understanding of what it means to be an advertiser, was a matter of great debate in 2005-2006, due in part to China’s continuing opening-up as a result of stipulations written into the country’s 2001 WTO agreement. The year 2005 marked a specific milestone in China’s transition from a centrally-planned to market-based economy, for it was in this year that government protections put in place to help ease China into the global

economy were to be lifted, with the objective of introducing more powerful market mechanisms, like full competition. Also influencing this discussion was China's hosting of the then up-coming 2008 Olympics, which was to serve as an official "coming out party" for the country, and advertising was to be one means of displaying how much China had changed. Yet as a profession in an industry designed to help Chinese manufacturers cope with these adjustments, many in advertising expressed concern over the best way to accomplish this task. One of the reasons why had to do with the continuing influence of socialist notions of production within the profession, and the manner in which these notions affected the execution of advertising.

In this chapter, I engage in an analysis of advertising as a practice over the course of China's development as a nation. In producing this analysis, I engage in a discussion of the rise of advertising as a profession in the early 20th century, and its role in promoting certain notions of what Chinese political reformers and elites viewed as modern. From this review, I then turn attention to the place and transformation of advertising under Mao, and the manner in which it helped to produce a certain consciousness of modernity distinctive from that of the preceding era. Before reconnecting these discussions with one focused on advertising in the current moment, I first take a moment to consider the seeming incommensurability of advertising with socialism in China by addressing the specific form of society advertising practitioners now practice—that of late socialism.

Socialism Does Not Equal Advertising

The argument can be made that advertising and socialism do not go together. As a system predicated on notions of egalitarianism and the collective development of mankind into its full potential, advertising, as a mechanism of hedonistic individualism clearly does not fit. Rather, advertising is better suited for and

characteristic of capitalism, a system geared toward the individual and the realization of the development of the individual into his or her fullest state of being. Such is the understanding of advertising I had in mind when I began my fieldwork in 2005. As a country in the throes of transition from the planned-economy model of socialism to the market-economy model of capitalism, to think of China as capitalist seemed the only way possible to explain the presence of advertising. From large billboards selling soccer cleats to small flyers for cell phones, advertisements were everywhere present in a society that still identifies as socialist. But soon after arriving, it became clear to me that perhaps such an assessment was wrong, for all around me were advertisements.

But how could that be? Where had this understanding that I had failed to question come from? Like all anthropologists, prior to beginning fieldwork, I prepared by turning to the current literature on my subject to learn what I should know. I did so in order to help paint a picture of the environment I would be entering, and to present myself with a framework to understand what lay in store for me once in China. As such, I read articles and monographs written by scholars whose work focused on mainland Chinese society in a state of transition, and from their works culled the idea of China as capitalist. A good example of the literature in question is an essay by Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar which serves as the introduction to a collection on the subject of economic reforms in post-Mao China (Goldman and MacFarquhar 1999). In this piece, the authors make the argument that Chinese society now exists in a state of “paradox” as the result of the Communist Party’s 1978 decision to “move away from Mao’s policies” in favor of a far more “pragmatic” program (Goldman and MacFarquhar 1999: 4). This paradox is viewed to be the specific product of the party-state’s adoption of market mechanism, like

advertising, to elevate China out of poverty and a generally low standard of living caused by the government's "experiment" with socialism.

For a socialist state concerned with its own legitimacy, the tension caused by turning to capitalism could mean nothing but the signal of socialism's own end in China. "Unlike his predecessors, Deng had no overarching vision. Provided the party stayed in power, he was prepared to sanction *any* means of catapulting China out of poverty: the cat could be any color...as long as it caught mice" (Goldman and MacFarquhar 1999: 4; emphasis added).³² A similar sounding argument was made in many of the anthropological texts I read, as well as in articles written on the subject of advertising in the wake of China's opening (Stross 1990). According to one such article, written by Randall Stross, the reemergence of commercial advertising in China amounts to what can only be imagined as the Communist state's "ideological reversal" on capitalism. This is because, as a "totem of advanced capitalist culture" advertising "occupied a particularly significant place" among adjustments being made to China's economy and society that "forced the Chinese to reconsider distinctions that had formerly been drawn between capitalist and socialist societies" (Stross 1990: 485).

In both examples, it is possible to detect a sense of the inevitability of socialism's demise to the greater strength of capitalism as a system, most notably in their conclusions. In the first instance there is what is written by Goldman and MacFarquhar,

The post-Mao economic reforms and the opening to the outside world have finally begun to fulfill the wish of China's reformers since the late nineteenth century to make China "rich and powerful". China has a greater international

³² The comment following the colon in this quotation is actually a comment attributed to Deng Xiaoping, former Chinese premier, spoken at the opening of the reform period in 1978.

presence than at any other time in the twentieth century, and a majority of Chinese have seen an improvement in their standard of living...however, China's success has been at a cost to ...the Leninist party-state...The shift to the market and the accompanying disintegration of the command economy released suppressed energies and entrepreneurial skills, as Deng and his colleagues had anticipated. But...these forces also engendered a discontent lying beneath the surface...(Goldman and MacFarquhar 1999: 25).

While in the second case there is this that is written by Stross,

The reintroduction of advertising in China did not prove to be as lethal as a hydrogen bomb, *but* there did seem to be a convergence between advertising in socialist and capitalist economies...(Stross 1990: 501).

While only two examples written by two very different types of scholars—political scientists in the case of Goldman and MacFarquhar, and a professor of business studies in the case of Stross, what both share is a tone characteristic of analyses of China's economic reforms and its core mechanisms written in the 1990s.

In almost every instance where China and its reforms constitute an aspect of analysis, what appears is the idea that China *cannot but be* capitalist if the aims and achievements the country has aspired to and obtained for itself are to be understood. Yet as noted in the previous chapter, social scientific studies focused on large-scale changes to societies, like the economic reforms applied to China's economy over the past three decades, which privileging readings of capitalism's superiority over other systems, actually do more to expose what is assumed to be humanity's default state of existence more than anything else. Daniel Miller has made a similar argument. In a follow-up to his important study of modernity and advertising in Trinidad (Miller 1994), Miller points out that "throughout the contemporary world there is a general recognition that we live within a world dominated by capitalism. The degree to which

this was diluted by alternative ideas such as socialism has diminished significantly...” (Miller 1996: 2). But as he goes on to explain, this “general recognition” is predominantly due to the acceptance of the idea, based on neo-classical economists’ models that capitalism possesses but one *ideal* form that replicates itself everywhere the same. As a result, conceptions of what capitalism *is* or *should be* become distorted when faced with the specificities of the ethnographic record (Miller 1996: 9).

I draw attention to Miller’s argument is because like Trinidad, China’s transition from a centrally-planned to market-based economy challenges our accepted ideas of capitalism. This challenge is evident in the continuing presence of the Communist Party. At the current moment, Chinese society is situated in a state of existence somewhere between that which is intelligible as either capitalist or socialist. Because of the nature of contemporary Chinese society is one of “betwixt and between” socialism and capitalism, practices, like advertising, which are associated with the production of culture and cultural identity in both systems, take on the unique quality as being neither *of*, nor *in*, either system (Chun 2006). This state is what anthropologists argue constitutes a formation known as “late-socialism,” a period of historical existence distinct for its simultaneous bringing together of characteristic features of socialism and capitalism (Yurchak 1997, 2003; Hernandez-Reguant et al. 2009). In China, the historical period synonymous with this formation is that of *gaige kaifang*, that of “reform and opening” concomitant with the rise of Deng Xiaoping as leader of China’s Communist Party.

Late-socialism is a term most closely associated with the work of János Kornai, an economist, who has focused on understanding the demise of socialism as a system and alternative vision of modernity (Kornai 1992). It is in the context of his magnum opus, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism*, that the term appears, specifically regarding his analysis of why states identifying as socialist

seek change in the first place. According to Kornai, socialist governments, such as that once in power in the Soviet Union, depart from the strict format of Marxist-Leninist state socialism, with its heavy emphasis on bureaucracy and the bureaucratic coordination of the economy, in order to rectify discrepancies in the system. These discrepancies often manifested themselves in the form of chronic shortages and inefficient production that stemmed from the bureaucratic nature of the state as it sought to fulfill its ideological “promise” of closing the developmental gap between their societies and the “most highly developed capitalist countries” (Kornai 1992: 53). Therefore, it is in an attempt to correct such problems that reforms of the economy are initiated. But as Kornai also explains, such reforms do not necessarily equal a departure on the part of the party-state from its original mandate of building socialism, and convincing the population over which it claims the right to rule that any changes made still amount to the building of the nation as socialist.

Advertising in the Context of China’s Historical Development

Advertising in Republican and Nationalist China

Advertising in the commercially institutional form discussed in this dissertation first appeared in China in 1979, following a close to thirty year absence. However, these practices had their precedent in an earlier manifestation of commercialism during China’s Republican era. Like its late 20th/early 21st century counterpart, Republican era advertising was also born out of an interaction with the West, and served as a means of opening up and expanding the basis of knowledge through which Chinese came to know the self as modern. According to Sherman Cochran in his essay ‘Transnational Origins of Advertising in Early-Twentieth

Century China,” (1995) advertising first took shape as a profession under the guidance of foreign advertisers seeking a means to better connect with Chinese consumers.

In explaining how this process worked, Cochran describes the efforts undertaken by British-American Tobacco (BAT) executives to transplant the latest “American technology for making advertising...” as well as open a “school in lithography to teach workers to use acquired printing machinery” (Cochran 1995: 39-40). Besides these actions, what also contributed to the build up of a Chinese industry was the company’s decision to hire Chinese artists and middle-men to help western employees coordinate business in China. During this time, China officially came to identify as a nation, as political reformers seeking to modernize the country overthrew and abandoned traditional forms of rule and culture for those imported from the West (Duara 1995; Fitzgerald 1996). Leaders of the Republican state viewed media as a helpful tool in the building of Chinese society into their vision of China as modern nation. In order to denote this change within the culture, Republican politicians introduced changes to daily styles of dress, comportment, hygiene and education (Harrison 2001). But in order to help spread knowledge of these transformations, new modes of communications were required. Transmission of knowledge of these changes was accomplished partly through the creative arrangement of symbols from within Chinese culture, such as those familiar from popular literature and stories, in advertisements with newly emerging features within society. Cochran describes just such an occurrence,

In his calendar posters for BAT, Zhou [Muqiao] identified the beauty of contemporary Chinese women less with past archetypes (like the sickly Liu Daiyu) and more with changes in current fashions. In BAT’s calendar poster for 1914, he showed a lady next to a rock, which was an old-style juxtaposition in Chinese art, but he clothed his subject in a new-style Chinese

costume, the *qipao*, a high-collared jacket with slits up the sides and buttons running from the neck across the chest and down the right side. Zhou's choice of costume was strikingly fashionable because Han Chinese women had only recently begun wearing *qipao*, prior to the revolution of 1911, it had only been worn by Manchu women, and ironically, it achieved its first popularity with Chinese women after the revolution overthrew China's Manchu rulers (Cochran 1999: 41, 44).

As indicated, the artist's subtle reworking of a concept led to a striking result, aided by the introduction of production techniques—mechanical and stylistic—imported from the West. Yet what is also interesting about this comment is it not only the effects of juxtaposing of old and new in the advertisement, but also the medium itself. The calendar posters spoken of introduced a completely new look and formulation of advertising to Chinese society, one where visual representation of ideas, as well as products, took center stage. While Cochran focuses mainly on the effect of China's early 20th century opening to the West on the shaping of an emerging Chinese consumer culture, it is also remarkable for its attention to the shaping of social practices associated with the production of cultural identity. In a separate study of the Republican era, cultural studies scholar Leo Lee also makes mention of the social importance of advertising during this period. This importance stems from what he argues is advertising's ability to define shifts in Chinese consciousness of time through its promotion of products and ideas, and therefore produce a certain ethos of living that could be defined as modern (Lee 1999: 44).

As the Republican era advanced, advertisements and their production techniques also grew in sophistication. Yet at the same time, the content and appearance of advertisements also became more openly nationalistic in their formulation. Karl Gerth discusses this aspect of Chinese advertising during this phase,

officially identified with the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-Shek (1927-1945) (Gerth 2003). Gerth's analysis takes as its main focus the propagandized nature of advertising in China, and in a different vein than either Cochran or Lee, views advertising and consumption not in terms of being a means of modernization, but instead as a component of Chinese nationalism. Such a reading of advertising is surprising, but only to the extent that the argument of nationalism and advertising's service to the state does not actually place advertising outside China's pursuit of modernity. In fact, if anything, it actually preempts what would happen to the profession and industry under the Communists.

Advertising in a time of revolution

Socialism in China is most closely associated with the period of time during which Mao Zedong served as the head of state of China under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (1949-1976). As a classically socialist society of the sort described by Kornai, where power and bureaucratic control of the economy and all productive activities become the jurisdiction of a single, Communist party, advertisements and their production were of a fundamentally different nature from what preceded the founding of the socialist state, and what now exists today in China (Kornai 1992). To begin, not long after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the Party put an end to production of advertisements of a commercial nature as part of its efforts to consolidate its power and influences. Eradication of advertising was deemed possible on the basis of two main tenets of socialist ideology. The first concerned distribution of goods, and the second power.

As a system, socialism's merits were viewed by its proponents as resting in its superior ability to facilitate production, accomplished through planning, and thereby bypassing the problems of inefficiency tied to competition and exploitation inherent in

capitalism (Kornai 1992; Verdery 1996). By ceasing the production of commercial advertising, the Party was also able to successfully remove potential challenges in the form of other discourses concerning the nature of social relations. Replacing advertisements were propaganda posters, highly politicized images depicting various themes and concepts associated with socialist ideology. These posters were utilized by the Party to help rouse within the population a particular consciousness. While clearly associated with the political practices of other Communist states, the use of propaganda posters by the CCP also shared in a legacy of their use by other Chinese rulers. This understanding appears in an overview of the rise of propaganda posters in China by the sinologist Stefan Landsberger. According to Landsberger,

Through all of its long history, the Chinese political system used the arts to propagate correct behavior and thought. Literature, poetry, painting, stage plays, songs, and other artistic expressions were produced...[and] given an important didactic function: they had to educate the people in what was considered right and wrong at any one time...Once the People's Republic was established...propaganda art continued to be one of the major means to provide examples of correct behavior (Landsberger 2008: 16).

The responsibility for the production of posters fell to “the most talented artists...many” of whom had “worked on the commercial calendars that had been...popular before the People's Republic was founded” (Landsberger 2008: 16). As Landsberger explains, these former advertising professionals now working in the service of the state were chosen because they were “well-versed in design techniques and able to visualize a product in a commercially attractive way” (Landsberger 2008: 16).

Considering that posters focused on fostering what Judith Farquhar argues was a “revolutionary consciousness” among Chinese citizens, it comes as no surprise to

learn that in order to induce such feelings, poster producers followed certain rules (Farquhar 2002). Unlike today, or even prior to the People's Republic, artists working in the service of the party-state worked in the style of socialist realism as set by state policy. This policy had its roots in the revolutionary campaigning of the Communist Party before coming to power. As a stylistic and aesthetic practice, socialist realism aimed at "present[ing] a 'historically correct concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development' ...[which] in practice...mean[t] that artists...meet certain...demands" (Schudson 1984: 215), with the most important being a moral one. In China, as in other socialist society studied by anthropologists, this moral demand focused on popularizing the notions that work was glorious and personal sacrifice, too, since both, together, contributed to the overall well-being of society (Verdery 1996; Dunn 2004; Boyer 2005; Wolfe 2005). As a result, posters of the Maoist era often depicted scenes of communal strivings for success as well as imagery of individuals either proudly or stalwartly engaging in an activity to benefit others. In producing this imagery, artists drew on symbols from traditional Chinese culture so as to induce a sense of continuity between the cultural world they inhabited and the foreign concepts being introduced in citizens' everyday lives.

Advertising in a time of reform

Like commercial advertisements today, propaganda posters were a ubiquitous aspect of Chinese society under Mao. But upon his death in 1976, the use of posters began to subside as the Party began to disengage from the rhetoric of revolutionary struggle championed by Mao and follow a new course toward modernization. Taking their place, once again, were advertisements of a commercial nature, which, rather than promoting core socialist themes, instead promoted consumption. This switch to commercialism as a means of developing the country, while seemingly contradictory,

did not, however, fall outside the purview of the Party's own logic. This was because advertising, like other market coordinating mechanisms (e.g., price), was not singled out as the primary means through which society would be shaped. Instead, advertising *and* the market concept itself were integrated into a framework where both operated as part of the Party's system of bureaucratic controls. Zhihong Gao comments on this new role for advertising following the death of Mao in an essay focused on the trajectory of advertising's development over the course of reforms (Gao 2002).

In his essay, Gao argues that advertising's (re) emergence after Mao occurred under a radically different set of assumptions than in capitalist societies. As pointed out, none of the "fertile social foundations that...provide[d] the fertile soil for modern advertising in capitalist countries" appeared in China (Gao 2002: 195). Whereas in capitalist societies, advertising "is seen as the institution of affluence because it provides a primary solution to the problem of overproduction through promotion of consumption...in China the reintroduction...was not preceded by material abundance (Gao 2002: 199). Quite the opposite situation was, in fact, the case. Reliance on planning and a command economy had produced conditions where the supply of goods made available to citizens often fell short. Because production followed a planned logic, demand was not taken into account as a significant factor. As a consequence, cadres (government administrators) instead exercised a tendency to produce in order to fill and meet the ideological demands of the system, ignoring altogether the lived reality of the population.³³ Such "macroeconomic imbalance" ultimately proved responsible for economic stagnation, and the Party's decision to adopt a market-oriented strategy to help develop and pull the country out of its

³³ In her book, *What was Socialism, and What Comes Next* (1996), Katherine Verdery presents a nice, comparative ethnographic analysis of the sort of situation described above regarding Romania under Ceausescu, although her attention is granted more to the issue of transition to a state of post- rather than late-socialism. In the book, Verdery develops her analysis in a manner similar to what I have done, basing her reading of events and changes taking place in Romanian society after the fall of the Communist party on Kornai's work.

economic problems. In order to do so, Party officials under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, took to reformulating the method within with the distribution of goods occurred, turning to advertising as a way to announce their presence and availability.

As instruments designed to illustrate the dawning of a new phase of socialist development, advertisements took on an appearance very different from that of their Maoist predecessors. First, advertisements looked like advertisements—they expressed commercial concepts, particularly the ideas of buying and selling. Gone were the explicit referents to revolution, rendered out of a stock of predefined images and ideas. These earlier referents, so common in propaganda posters, were replaced by simple scenes showing products alone or in use, as the producers of advertisements gave up their use of socialist realism, and adopted production techniques more aligned with that found in the capitalist West (Wang 2000; Li 2006). The problem, however, was that these techniques had their origins in the earlier era of commercialism, and soon proved insufficient for the needs of the new moment in which practitioners worked. In order to improve this situation, the government passed a series of laws to help facilitate exchange between Chinese advertising professionals and their western counterparts. This change in techniques arose as the direct result of the interaction of Chinese advertising practitioners with foreigners in the field. These relationships were fostered through policy, primarily laws aimed at improving the level and quality of Chinese advertising so that, as mentioned in Chapter Two, it was on par with that of the West.

Of the laws in question, the first to have an influence on advertising was the “Law of the People’s Republic on Joint-Ventures Using Chinese and Foreign Investment.” Effective as of 1979, this law was designed to foster exchange with advanced industrialized societies by allowing foreign companies to acquire a minority share (not more than 49% prior to 2005) in a Chinese company. Many foreign

companies, including foreign advertising agencies, took advantage of this opportunity, as indicated by my examination of GLBJ (see Chapter Two). Under the guidelines of the law, partners in joint ventures operated in roles designed to facilitate exchange that would be mutually beneficial. In the case of advertising, this meant foreign agencies as one contracting partner, would share their expertise—their knowledge of artistic design, branding, research, and marketing more generally—in exchange for access to China’s opening consumer markets.

The next act of the state to have a significant impact on advertising practice and production was the passing of a “Provisional Regulation on Advertising” in 1982, governing the specific content of advertisements. The Provisional Regulation stipulated just how the party-state foresaw the place of advertising as an industrial practice. In unequivocal language, this document subordinated advertising to the state on the basis of its role as a service, in particular that of “building socialist spiritual civilization”. Updated versions of legislation concerning the role of advertising appeared in 1987 and again in 1995 with the passing of the first official law on advertising.³⁴ This latest law differed rather significantly from its predecessors, as all explicit language concerning the building of “socialist spiritual civilization” that had been written in to the previous two Regulations was removed, although the concept still appeared, and emphasis was still placed on controlling content, not dictating practice. In general, what the laws and regulations aimed at redefining advertising as an element of socialist cultural practice accomplished was constructing the structure for an industry to grow into. What these acts did not provide, as discussed in the next section, is a clear set of ideas to guide practice.

³⁴ The 1995 “Advertising Law of the People’s Republic of China.” Although I was already familiar with this document prior to arriving at GLBJ, I was promptly given a copy by one of the censors who worked at the agency (I was told all agencies in China have one, foreign or domestic), who gave it to me as part of his explanation of the basis of the relationship the agency has to the government.

Advertising in China Now

Advertising as a practice has acquired a significant degree of independence from the state as a result of the government's decision to substitute market mechanisms for the coordination of goods and services in lieu of itself. Both fully owned foreign and joint venture companies exist nestled with an ever-increasing number of domestic agencies. Because agencies are no longer owned or controlled by the government, they are instead free to set their own objectives. While generally viewed as a positive by practitioners, one negative consequence of this retreat has been the production a sort of ideological void in terms of the logic of the practice. Generally speaking, even though advertising as a profession possesses a modern structure, what is still missing from the field is a unified sense of how it is to meet its objectives of servicing clients. Just as in other contexts where the "hegemony of a planned developmentalism" has been partially eroded by a developmental logic rooted in neoliberal forms of capitalism, what has moved in to this void is a marketing and managerial logic consonant with western capitalism (Abu-Lughod 2005; Dunn 2004). This logic is most visible in the form of an industry discourse surrounding the practice of advertising within the agency.

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This discourse, with its emphasis on brands/branding, research, consumerism, creativity, and services, has largely made its way into circulation by way of trade publications and books, but also through the staging of events like professional meetings both grander and smaller than the agency-initiated one described above. These publications take various forms. Some are popular titles like the monthlies *International Advertising* (*Guoji Guanggao*), which is a Chinese-language version of the American trade journal *Advertising Age*, *Modern Advertising* (*Xiandai*

Guanggao), a fully domestic publication with an international circulation of its own, as well as the eponymous *China Advertising (Zhongguo Guanggao)*. Other sorts of trade publications include in-house journals, like the monthly supplied to GLBJ's employees as part of the agency's general working practice. Articles and editorial essays found within these publications by-and-large focus on trends and their integration into Chinese marketing practice. Authors of such pieces are primarily of mainland Chinese origin, and tend to have experience working in both multinational and domestic agency contexts. Most of these publications are recent phenomenon in China, dating back to the mid-1990s, but more often, to the early years of this decade, and are published in many different locations throughout the country, like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and Hong Kong. These various resources serve as the foundation for the makings of a professional consciousness, and are characterized by articles demonstrating lively and engaged discussions on the state of the field. Many advertising practitioners turn to these publications for knowledge regarding the latest trends in practice. But many also do so much in the way note by Elizabeth Dunn for the white collar Polish workers she studied; as a way to make the self into a professional (Dunn 2004).

In constructing the arguments of the articles carried in these publications, authors tend to rely on western theories concerning marketing developed by western marketing gurus. Such works are made available through bookstores which carry an abundant number of these works in translation. In particular, Chinese advertising practitioners draw on the work of people like David Ogilvy and David Aaker, whose ideas constitute the basis of much of the global thinking on advertising (Mazzarella 2003). One example of how these ideas are brought into practitioners' consciousness was made evident to me in an article appearing in GLBJ's in-house publication. This article, written by the agency's Chinese head of account planning in Shanghai,

focused on the nature of advertising practice in China by drawing on the notion of “iconic brands,” a concept associated with the work of Douglas B. Holt (Holt 2004). Like Aaker, Holt is also a professor of marketing whose ideas about branding have gained a degree of influence in the global field on account of his focus on the way brands take root and function in cultures. In order to convince her readership of these ideas—generally imagined in the work as the Chinese employees of the agency—the author sets up a contrast between Holt’s theory of brands as consumer “myths” and what she sees as conventions in Chinese advertising practice. This juxtaposition appears in the context of the following passage,

The idea here is “Never Push.” First of all, when a brand attempts to “push” consumers to take an action for a commercial purpose (e.g. urging for purchase), the myth falls apart. Anything to do with desired ideology simply cannot accommodate [a] commercial act. Secondly, when it comes to establishing myths, [a] ‘thought provoking’ approach often works better than ‘preaching’. One can provide the ‘stimulus’ rather than forcing the ‘response’.

As one can glean from this quotation, the author makes use of Holt’s understanding of a brand, especially the idea that it helps people to make sense of the world they live in, as a critique of advertising practice as it currently exists. While examined more fully in the next chapter, one characteristic of advertising practice in China at the moment is its “non-standardization,” an issue viewed by many of the practitioners I studied as having a detrimental effect on the final creative outcome of an advertisement and its general effectiveness in attracting consumers. In general, this problem was viewed as arising from clients, especially domestic clients whose rationale for advertising often differed widely from the reasoning attached to it by both the government and advertising professionals. Yet as the opening vignette to this chapter illustrates, part of the problem was also seen to rest in practitioners themselves, and one corrective

offered to this problem was to influence practice through collective forums like publications and meetings.

On the one hand, artifacts like trade publications, books in translation and meetings hold significance for a study of the shaping of advertising practitioners as cultural producers. This is because trade publications offer insight into the broader basis of the profession, one that extends beyond the confines of the advertising agency. Yet trade publications also do much more than provide insight. For on the other hand, these same artifacts harbor significance because they illustrate in vibrant detail what anthropologists' have observed as the gaps in the basis of knowledge citizens are forced to work with as a result of government policies aimed at economic liberation (Dunn 2004; Wolfe 2005). As in the case of the Soviet journalists studied by Thomas Wolfe in the context of late-socialism in Russia, Chinese advertising practice takes on many different forms. Some forms are primarily western, like that executed at GLBJ, while others are much closer to the sort of top-down command-style associated with socialism, as noted by Hongmei Li in her study of domestic advertising practitioners in China (Li 2006). But more often than not, as also observed by Li, practice takes on a hybrid form characterized by an admixture of western and ad-hoc techniques. While tied to a number of issues, more of which are explained in the next chapter, this ad-hoc quality can in part be understood as derived from the legacy of socialist production in China.

Given that one of the distinguishing features of classical socialism noted by Kornai was that of chronic shortage of resources for production, a common response among workers in such systems was to produce not according to plan, but according to their own ingenuity based on what was available to them. This ability to "make do" continues as a feature of advertising as it is practiced in China largely because of the general lack a clear sense of what objectives the advertising being produced is meant

to achieve. This lack of knowing, while partially driven by clients and their demands, also stems from what the economist Barry Naughton has observed as the objective of the government for instant social transformation by means of economic reform. Contrasting the objective of reformers in Eastern European countries undergoing reform to that of China's, Naughton writes,

China's approach was quite different. In the first place, the imperative of economic development was constantly on the minds of reform policy makers. It was never conceivable to Chinese policymakers that their economy would "mark time," postponing economic development until after an interlude of system transformation. It was always assumed that system transformation would take place concurrently with economic development and, indeed, that the process of economic development would drive market transition forward and guarantee its eventual success...(Naughton 1999: 32).

Highlighted by the example of advertising's professional discourse, this "concurrent" development of system and economy is also marked by queries of how to meet this goal. As can be seen, the prevailing logic adopted to help advertising professionals to do so also contains a masked critique of what has come to stand as China's indigenous advertising practice. Rather than fault the continuing influences of politics on practice, attention is instead given to "culture" as it manifests itself in the form of practitioners' knowledge of how advertising is supposed to work. Yet this critique is not necessarily the product of any specific hegemonic influence of western practitioners in China, as much of it comes from Chinese practitioners themselves.

To understand this potential contradiction, it is helpful to think back to what was argued in Chapter Three as the existence of a contradictory consciousness in China over the issue of modernity. In wanting to control their own transformation, Chinese in general have taken to borrowing concepts and ideas from the West as a

way of becoming culturally modern, in the process often attacking that which stands as culturally Chinese. For advertising practitioners, this attack is fixated on the general non-standardness, or “ad-hoc-ness,” of domestic production practices, such as the irregular use of consumer research in discovering the “insights” believed necessary by global practice for developing properly attuned advertisements. But as my argument in this chapter suggests, rather than understand the problems associated with Chinese advertising practice with “culture” as many observers of the profession have taken to doing, it makes greater sense to instead think of the still present influence of socialism in practitioners’ lives, and how its continuation works to shape practice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, my aim has been to analyze advertising as a practice in the context of China as a nation. In doing so, my argument largely focused on the idea that China’s current formation as a late-socialist nation should not be discounted as a significant factor in the shaping of cultural products, like brands and advertisements, and their producers. My reasoning for this argument stemmed largely from the seeming contradictions and debates in place surrounding the use of advertising in China, which I ultimately viewed as tools for entering into an analysis of the underlying logic animating the development of Chinese cultural practice today. In the next chapter I continue this examination through my analysis of a specific discourse on creativity at GLBJ, where I pay specific attention to the way employee understandings of Chinese clients illuminates understandings of the practice today.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CREATIVITY AS CULTURAL VALUE

“The Problem”

One hot summer’s day, while driving back from lunch out at a well-known Yunnan-style restaurant in Sanlitun, an area of the city famous for its bars and tourist scene, Joyce, one of GLBJ’s local account planners suddenly asked “is this one of ours?” Her tone inquisitive, Joyce sat staring out the backseat window of the car at an advertisement for China’s Mobile’s M-ZONE mobile phone calling plan. “I hope not,” immediately responded the head of planning, his tone critical and tinged with disgust. “I don’t like ads where people are smiling. How many happy ads can there be? It just seems so degrading, like we think you [the consumer] are stupid.” “Client request probably,” answered Ling, in a flat and matter-of-fact tone. “Yeah,” said the head of planning, exhaling the word as he spoke. Having come to a stop at a stoplight on busy GongTi Bei Lu,³⁵ the constantly jammed-with-traffic thoroughfare heading east-west across the middle of the city, it was soon clear to everyone what Joyce was commenting on.

The advertisement in question stood housed in a lightbox at a bus stop, and showed a beach scene with a young Chinese man seated on a sand volleyball court, energetically talking on the phone. Next to him is a volleyball, in which he has seemingly lost interest, a result of his phone call. A large grin is on his face. On the other side of the net stand two young Chinese women in bikinis with their arms folded across their chests, who, in contrast to the young man, wear pouts on their faces due to

³⁵ In English, the translation of this name is North Gongti Road, but I have retained the original spelling to maintain consistency with the spelling of other place names and roads used in other chapters of the thesis.

what can only be assumed as his lack of interest in *them*. Underneath the image is information about the mobile phone calling plan, supplied in copious detail. Besides informing potential plan customers (target audience being urban teenagers) of the benefits of the plan—fill up one’s free time by being part of M-ZONE’s 200,000 (person) network (*rang kongqi zhong dou chongman M-ZONE weidao bici dou you 200 wan de fensi*), and the best time to do so (23:00-09:00 for 0.15 *yuan* per minute or 09:00-23:00 for 0.25 *yuan* per minute)—the advertisement also shows how satisfied one will be by deciding to become a customer.

A little over a week later, a similar occurrence to the one mentioned above took place. I once again encountered criticism of local advertising practices while chatting with one of the few foreign employees holding a Creative Services staff position, an Australian named Jackson. I had come over to his work station to say hi and to inquire about the sort of work he was hired to engage in. As an online media designer, one of Jackson’s main duties included the design of web advertising and its embedding into websites. Jackson described his work as in-and-of-itself “okay” and enjoyable, but added that what actually counted as his job was to make sure “ads didn’t get too Chinese.” Struck by this comment, I asked Jackson what he meant, to which he replied, “Chinese websites are cluttered with too much information...ads floating across articles...*Very user unfriendly*. Locally Chinese designed ads also tend to have this quality. Information is crowded into the ad in the form of copy.” To Jackson, the crowded and haphazard design of local advertising accounted for what he viewed as “Chinese lacking creativity,” a statement I would hear in refrain over the course of my stay at GLBJ.

While it is possible to list yet more examples of employees’ chagrin over the aesthetic qualities of locally-produced advertising in China, something all those spoken of clearly saw themselves as engaged in, suffice it to say that they considered

local client's "lack" of creativity a real problem. As a business in an industry predicated on the production and selling of ideas, advertising generally frowns upon utilizing the same idea more than once. Either as a result of one's own or another's success with the concept, or presenting too many ideas at once (therefore sending an unclear message), repetition of ideas in advertising represents a major obstacle to having people take serious advertising's claim that advertisements form an essential form of communication in society. So if the ideas and their presentation of the examples discussed above did not constitute 'creativity' in the sense employees talked about this subject, what then *was* meant as constituting creativity in these utterances? And if local clients supposedly did not have, i.e., "lacked," this thing which made them creative, why was this the case?

Introduction

Discourse surrounding creativity at GLBJ serves as a lens into understanding how different sets of cultural values influence the production and uses of advertising and brands. In the following pages, I investigate this issue more deeply by engaging in an analysis of interviews conducted with GLBJ staff during my initial fieldwork in 2005-06, and then again during my return in September 2008, to help draw out and ascertain the meaning of creativity as a tool for modernization plied by the agency to its Chinese clients. To begin, I analyze how the concept of creativity was defined and utilized by the agency's professionals, focusing on their use of the discursive foil "local client." Next, I engage in a discussion of creativity as a matter of "taste"—that of consumers and local clients—as defined by GLBJ's employees, followed by a discussion of creativity as an emergent conceptual category in China used to talk about Chinese abilities to properly participate in the an increasingly globalized world. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on how my analysis of creativity and its usage by

agency employees and their local clients relates to recent anthropological studies of creativity as an ongoing generative process produced through peoples' response to the circumstances their lives as historical subjects brings their way. Therefore, what is of interest to anthropologists in my following discussion of employees' denunciations of local clients' communication styles is not so much the repetitive nature or conservatism of local client requests, but the lack of *cultural* value imagined as placed on creativity by Chinese clients.

Creativity as emerging cultural category

It can be argued that creativity in the sense it was discussed at GLBJ was an emergent concept category in China in 2005-06, something Michael Keane suggests in his recent work on creativity and creative industries in China (Keane 2007). In fact, his entire book is dedicated to detailing and analyzing the movement of the concept of creativity into China and its subsequent adoption by the central government and industry, an issue examined in greater detail in Chapter Three. It was precisely in this emergent sense that I found the discourse surrounding creativity at GLBJ to exist. I show in the comparison with how local clients and GLBJ employees approached the production and use of advertising below that 'creativity' carried much greater value for employees than clients. In fact, as this chapter will hopefully portray, creativity as a category valued for understanding social action (Graeber 2001), was, if anything, still in the process of coming into being, rather than already in existence.

As a category used to describe a particular form of social engagement with others, GLBJ's definition of creativity also came up against challenges because of pre-existing understandings of what creativity is. According to Keane, creativity's acceptance in contemporary China has been bound up in its transformation from being viewed as a "bourgeois" concept, associated with the production of culture, in the

sense of “high” rather than “popular” culture, to one of modernity and progress (Keane 2008: 6). Under Mao, this meant that any activity considered to be creative in nature, like dance, music, or art (e.g., painting, calligraphy), or commercial in nature, like advertising, came under suspicion and was either incorporated into the state through collectivization efforts or forbidden and abolished outright. But in the decades following his death and with the erosion of Maoist socialist theory through the combination of government fiat and market forces, ‘creativity’ in its original “high” and “commercial” sense has, since 2003, steadily (and officially) emerged as a concept with social value for the Chinese (Keane 2007: 80).

In Chinese, the word most commonly associated with the idea of creativity is *chuangzaoli*. Composed of two words—*chuangzao*, meaning “to create; bring forth” and “*li*,” which possesses the meaning of “power; strength, ability; force,”—*chuangzaoli* stood in contrast to the word used to connote creativity in an advertising context—*chuangyi*.³⁶ *Chuangyi* was the word synonymous with the title of “creative” at GLBJ (and other agencies as well), carrying the meaning of “idea or ideational” work, thanks to the word *yi*, which means “concept or idea,” and is a relatively new addition to the Chinese language. Efforts to locate evidence of the word *chuangyi* in Chinese prior to the early 2000’s proved fruitless, as even the *Ci Hai* (*Sea of Words*), the Chinese equivalent to the Oxford English Dictionary, contained no entries for the word. As Keane, drawing on Lydia Liu’s important study of the translation of the concept “modernity” in early 20th century China (Liu 1995), argues

³⁶ Perhaps also of importance to the discussion of creativity as a native category is the meaning of the word *chuang*, which carries the meaning of “initiate; inaugurate” and is also the root of the word for “innovation” in Chinese—*chuangxin*.

The term ‘creativity’ is...a super-sign: it operates across linguistic and cultural barriers, and across disciplinary boundaries. The most widespread translation for creativity in Chinese is *chuangzaoli* (literally the power of creation). Discussions of *chuangzaoli* inevitably derive from the fields of cognitive and behavioural psychology, reflecting emphasis on gifted individuals more so than embedded cultural capital. The non-standard mandarin [*sic*] translations of creativity (*chuangyi*)...were adopted in Hong Kong and subsequently exported to China. The term brings together the morphemes *chuang*... and *yi*...The new word was initially unfamiliar to many Chinese [policy makers]; on the other hand, it was imbued with imported freshness, often a good indicator of acceptance in Mainland China. However, the etymology was ultimately Western: *chuangyi* did indeed criss-cross the semantic fields of two or more languages simultaneously (Keane 2007: 80)

The manner in which I learned of the difference between the two terms came also came about through interviews, when, unknown to me, I would incorrectly use the word *chuangyi* in my inquiries about working at the agency, only to be corrected and told that the correct word was *chuangzaoli*. Although embarrassing, making such a mistake early on in my research proved helpful primarily because it allowed me to understand the distinction between the two terms.

But such differences had little to do with local client receptivity of GLBJ’s version of advertising, an argument I make on the basis of what was said to me by GLBJ’s associate executive creative director about advertising professionals not taking the time to learn about China and clients in China, and how business is done there. In her recent book on advertising, brands and commercialism in China, cultural studies scholar Jing Wang takes special pains to highlight differences in Chinese and Western approaches to branding and advertising (Wang 2008). Taking as her starting

point the cases of Haier and Lenovo,³⁷ two Chinese “superbrands” (Wang 2008: 144), Wang writes that both companies prefer the branding of corporate culture over individual products through a process known as the “branded-house strategy,” a strategy explained as “favored by East Asian corporate giants, who extend product lines under the umbrella of a master brand...In contrast, there are few corollaries in the Western market, where stand-alone brand architecture dominates, for such enormous brand stretch [quoting Owen 1993]” (Wang 2008: 146). As such, Wang argues,

In addition to frowning on practices like those of Haier and Lenovo, Western marketing literature in general has taken a critical stance toward the trade-dominant Asian business culture, seeing it as deeply marred by an emphasis on short-term gains and tactics. It is said to be a profit-conscious trading culture whose “sales/margin oriented logic” breeds a marketing environment that privileges selling and distribution rather than branding and marketing...This same “mercenary tradition” has reputedly paved the way for the Asian emphasis on corporate brand equity over product brand equity. *To remedy such a “disadvantageous” business practice, Chinese corporate managers and advertising professionals have been advised to replicate the Western marketing paradigm* (Wang 2008: 146; emphasis mine).

I quote Wang at length in order to draw attention to a number of parallels between her statement concerning China’s two largest brands (those known globally outside of China) and what was said to me regarding local clients. As she points out, these two companies have come under attack because of the emphasis they place on

³⁷ Haier, known officially as Haier Group, is a white goods manufacturer, primarily refrigerators and air conditioning units, although the company has diversified into a number of different product areas since its founding in 1992 as a joint venture with Germany’s Liebherr. Lenovo, or Lenovo Group, is the new official name of the Chinese PC manufacturer Legend, most famous for its 2005 acquisition of IBM’s famous ThinkPad brand.

popularizing the company, rather than its individual products, a practice seen as ill-suited for the “postmodern advertising” environment within which Chinese companies now increasingly participate (Wang 2008: 175). And while not all local clients are a Lenovo or a Haier, many aspire to the same dream of having a wide influence and being the one entity in (and ultimately outside of) China responsible for bringing positive attention to Chinese-made goods and services.

Yet Wang is not content to simply leave this argument as is, and instead counters criticisms of Chinese marketing practice with the pronouncement that even though the above detailed domestic approach may not work outside of China, it does work within, although as I explain in the next chapter, such may not actually be the case. And while I agree with her analysis of local business approaches to marketing, it is important to note that Wang is highly defensive of the local Chinese approach, seeing it as something that could ultimately, in time, be as valuable to the global marketing arena as the “subbrand” logic now in ascendancy. Her interest in her book is twofold, for whereas her argument clearly rests on an exposition of contemporary Chinese advertising practice, she also is engaged in a defense to equalize domestic rationalizations of advertising and branding with that of the ubiquitous “West”. Yet as both she and my research shows, such equality has not yet been achieved, making the need to identify what constitutes so-called local client “lack of creativity” an important pursuit.

The constitution of “creativity” at GLBJ

In order to begin to answer the questions posed at the end of the opening section of this chapter, it becomes necessary to understand how GLBJ employees defined creativity. At GLBJ, creativity was often spoken about to me in terms of “risk” and “simplicity,” in relation to branding, and was always juxtaposed against

what employees felt they saw as missing in local client advertisements and branding efforts—the presence of “fresh ideas,” as the agency’s executive creative director put it. In explaining who held responsibility for this absence, for the lack of “fresh” ideas, inevitably the client was to blame. In employees’ estimations, local clients in China were said to “lack creativity” because of a perceived penchant to possess an attitude that encouraged going with “safety” things, as stated by a copywriter on staff, and shying away from “adventure”.

Like other agencies of its type, GLBJ promoted an understanding of creativity as “the novel combination of ideas” and “originality,” based on the idea that difference amounts to success in the marketplace. This definition of creativity corresponds to what Margaret A. Boden argues are commonplace understandings of creativity as the generation of the new or novel (Boden 1994). Such a position on creativity mimicked a larger western discourse about creativity rooted in business media circles (*The Economist* 2005; Javidan and Lynton 2005), with such a discourse itself rooted in broader western notions of modernity (Ingold and Hallam 2007). According to Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam in their introduction to a recent volume of anthropological studies of creativity (2007), understandings of creativity which view it as “novel” constitute readings of social actions as “innovation,” which in turn is a “backwards reading, symptomatic of modernity” whereby “creativity [is] a power not so much of adjustment and response to the consideration of a world-in-formation as a liberation from the constraints of a world that is already made” (Ingold and Hallam 2007: 3). This reading of creativity as innovation is, in the authors’ opinion, problematic, because it takes for granted the idea that culture, when predicated on the adoption or following of a model, such as a specific type of cultural practice, will at all times and in all places always be the same, regardless of the influence of a place’s specific history or unique approach to the practice in question.

Yet as Ingold and Hallam go on to explain, this is not the case, for,

Copying or imitation...is not the simple, mechanical process of replication that it is often taken to be, of running off duplicates from a template, but entails a complex and ongoing alignment of observation of the model with action in the world. In this alignment lies the work of improvisation. The formal resemblance between the copy and the model is an *outcome* of this process, not given in advance (Ingold and Hallam 2007: 5).

But in the most basic of terms, creativity is important to advertising not because of this understanding, “creativity as novelty/innovation,” but because it is the thing—the competence—that agencies barter in; it is both a tool that advertising agencies use in the form of a process, like the “Total” approach, as well as a product sold to clients in the form of a creative expression known as an advertisement or brand.

This understanding of creativity as competence results in part on account of my time at GLBJ, but also on the basis of my reading of Timothy Malefyt’s work on advertising. In an article titled ‘Models, Metaphors and Client Relations: The Negotiated Meanings of Advertising,’ (Malefyt 2003), Malefyt argues that advertising is a negotiated process full of power plays.

In the world of advertising, information over goods, such as their meaning and use by consumers, becomes a particular form of power. Those who are able to control access to information seek a monopoly advantage in their position.

Since the world of advertising revolves around relations with the client, power for an agency resides not in the actual production of goods, but in the shaping or ‘producing’ of information about those goods (Malefyt 2003: 140).

It is not a seamless process that flows from day one when a client assigns an agency its business, but instead is one of calculated maneuver on the part of agencies to demonstrate “competence” in light of extreme uncertainty (Malefyt 2003: 142). For

GLBJ, this competence was imagined as lying in the agency's ability to produce, through branding, a client's success in the market. In and of itself there is nothing wrong with this model of thinking about creativity, for it fit well the idea the agency as a whole stood on as a defining characteristic of its services, its "brand" if you will, in relation to other advertising agencies.³⁸ But where trouble arose for GLBJ was precisely in the nature of the "uncertainty" the agency faced when working with domestic clients, and this uncertainty had to do with what creativity meant to them.

"Local" Clients

As explained in Chapter Two, GLBJ did business with a number of different types of clients ranging from large-scale multinationals, to small(er)-scale domestic companies, with the bulk of the agency's emphasis on gaining more business with local clients. "Local" was an appellation commonly used by employees to distinguish between the nature of the sort of advertiser contacting and contracting the agency for work, although at times this distinction could be dropped and local clients became spoken of as simply "clients". I bring this point up because of the sort of confusion I experienced when talking with employees about the different types of clients serviced by the agency. While it was clear that as a multinational agency GLBJ worked for clients of multiple cultural and national origins, it was not always clear to me just what sort of client was being discussed unless I asked. A perfect example of my confusion surrounded a conversation I had with the head of account planning over clients and creativity, the subject of this chapter. After going on for a while about how little clients seemed to understand about creativity, I ventured to ask if he was talking about Chinese clients, to which he scoffed "of course." I found this answer

³⁸ By the phrase "agency as a whole" I am referring back to what was written in Chapter Two regarding GLBJ existing as part of a larger network of offices under the auspices of the larger American-based agency Global Local Advertising.

troublesome, for what struck me about his “of course,” was that for me there was nothing natural about the idea that local, that is, Chinese, clients should be who he was talking about. Therefore, it is the reification of the idea that local clients were somehow creatively challenged that motivates me to explore creativity here and take into consideration how categories like creativity take on meaning as a subject of context.

I retain the use of the signifier “local” to make clear to readers the sort of client about which I speak. Local clients represented a potential growth market for GLBJ, as more and more domestically-operated businesses emerged in China as a result of government-led market deregulation. Viewed by management as integral to its future in China, local clients were given a sort of pride-of-place in GLBJ’s efforts to secure their business. But such coveting often belied the fact that local clients were also viewed by agency employees as “difficult to work with” on account of their seemingly underdeveloped sense of creativity. Why?

Reasons: “Vision” and the “Short-term Win”

One reason given to me concerning this perceived “difficulty” had to do with how local clients were viewed as approaching the act of requesting advertising. According to Ling, the account planner, a major problem faced by her and her colleagues concerned a local client’s sense of direction. “Clients often lack a clear vision of what they want,” opined Ling, as she sat facing me across the large wooden table in the library. We had come into the library in order to conduct an interview regarding Ling’s impressions of working in advertising, and so as not to disturb other account planners who sat working at their desks roughly ten feet away beyond the library’s glass doors. While active in advertising for only a short time, one and a half years, and an investment banker before that, Ling was clear in her assertion about

local clients. “In China, there is no clear understanding of marketing and advertising by Chinese. Chinese people know there is a word “marketing” (*yingxiao*) and “advertising” (*guanggao*) and that they need it, but don’t really understand.” As we continued to talk, Ling went on to add that the problems generally faced had to do with what she felt was a client not knowing what it wants or how to communicate what it wants, in part because China is “pretty open [and] people don’t really know what they are doing.” When I asked if this is a widespread problem, Ling replied that she “didn’t really know,” but in her experience that was the case.

From our conversation, it became clear to me that a major component of advertising has to do with how a client communicates ideas for what it wants an agency to produce on its behalf (Mazzarella 2003). However, as Ling’s experience had shown her, this was often not the case. Instead, what she felt occurred on a regular basis was for a client—both international and local, but more often for local—to produce and share a communiqué that lacked a clear delineation between an overall business plan and a specific marketing strategy. While interconnected, the two, business plan and marketing strategy, were clearly different in her eyes, and in the eyes of other employees as well. Case-in-point was a comment made by one of the agency’s regional business directors, who felt that in China, working with clients was like teaching “Marketing 101”. In fact, so many employees expressed frustration at this situation that they felt without knowing exactly what constituted the basis of a client’s advertising request, that ‘creativity,’ the advertising to be made, was bound to be constrained.

But lack of direction was not the only reason given to explain local clients’ “lack of creativity”. Another reason given for this “lack” was seen as having to do with the emphasis placed on “sales and profits” by local companies. In employees’ eyes, because so many businesses were in what a local business director termed “a

sales promotion stage, and not yet a branding [or] creative stage,” ‘creativity’ in the form of imaginative advertising was forced to take a back seat to advertising of a more mundane nature (see also Wang 2008). Take for example how the effect of this emphasis on sales and profits was explained to me by the vice-president of advertising. Speaking about the nature of challenges encountered on the job, he expressed in rather blunt terms that for most local clients “advertising probably is about twenty percent or less of their thinking...from a marketing perspective, the budget...investment...is highest to advertising, but clients see advertising as a service, not an influence.” To understand these comments, especially that of “advertising as a service, not an influence,” it helps to contextualize these words in relation to what the vice-president said to me briefly before stating them. When asked what he felt the role advertising might have in light of the economic and social changes now shaping China, he replied,

Advertising brings [the] brand concept to peoples’ lives; advertising makes [the] decision [-making] process [for consumers] easier...because the *idea of advertising* and communication is to make life simpler. It can help people save their time...to think about the purpose of life. Good advertising can lift the cultural...[advertising] can help to improve the quality of...I mean, it’s a very massive and powerful weapon. It can tell people what is beautiful, what is ugly...this is why I want to be in this industry, to bring up the aesthetic (*shenmei*). That’s why I hate stupid advertising. You bring down the intelligence [of the consumer]. The job of advertising is to appeal to mass taste. It’s about more than the short-term win.”

Clearly, the vice-president held strong views both on what advertising *is*, and what it can *do*. His thinking corresponded closely to the position promoted by GLBJ that the objective of advertising in the current era is, as observed by other anthropologists

studying the subject, something that informs people and cultures about who they are in the sense of who or what they can become though attainment of what is shown in an advertisement (Kemper 2001; 2003; Mazzarella 2003; Baba 2003). In this sense, the sense expounded by the vice-president, advertising serves as a tool of enlightenment. But because local clients were viewed as thinking otherwise, such an understanding was imagined by employees as lost on those (local clients) who let the bottom line dull their aesthetic, i.e., creative, sensibilities and ultimately miss out on opportunities to really win consumers over. This understanding of the purpose of advertising, to serve as a tool of enlightenment, is best captured in the vice-president's comments pertaining to advertising being about "more than the short-term win". A brief discussion of this phrase, the "short-term win," can help explain what I mean.

Earlier in this chapter, I argued that in order to understand the importance employees attached to creativity one must first understand how it relates to branding as a product produced in the act of servicing clients. As a multinational advertising agency, GLBJ bartered in a notion of branding that matched up with most textbook interpretations of the term, as an,

Entire process involved in creating a unique name and image for a product (good or service) in the consumer's mind, through advertising campaigns with a consistent theme. Branding aims to establish a significant and differentiated presence in the market that attracts and retains loyal customers.³⁹

From the start of my stay at GLBJ, I knew that employees possessed this understanding of branding, but it was only made clear to me in interviews when an employee would explain to me how *different* the procedure was when carried out by local clients. As the vice-president exclaimed, most local clients looked at advertising as something to quickly entice consumers to purchase their products, not taking into

³⁹ <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/branding.html>. Accessed on 26 August 2009.

consideration that branding is based on the logic of establishing *long-term* emotional bonds between consumer and advertiser (Aaker 1996). In this formulation, the brand is not something born into existence instantly, but rather something cultivated in the minds of consumers through careful placement (the technical phrase here being “positioning,” see Ries and Trout 2001) on the part of advertising practitioners—a process William Mazzarella treats very thoughtfully and thoroughly in his analysis of advertising in India (Mazzarella 2003).

Rather than view branding in terms of “keeping-while-giving,” Mazzarella’s application of Annette Weiner’s classic rendering of the social significance of gift-giving, in employees’ commentaries, local clients were prone to ignore the consumer loyalty-retaining aspect of the brand-cum-gift. Instead, local clients tended to use a brand in the way advertisements, which tend to possess a much shorter life span; because as a tool of communication, advertisements are often designed to be relevant for only a short period of time, depending on a client’s need. As a result, this situation is what led the vice-president to the idea of local clients being interested in only the “short-term win”.

However, to say that local clients were the only ones responsible for this situation is perhaps unfair, as so far all I have done is indicate moments of displeasure iterated by employees. For as I noted earlier, not everyone found fault solely in local clients for what was termed local clients’ lack of creativity. One example of someone who did not think local clients solely to blame was Jackson, the Australian media designer mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. In his opinion, part of what he felt contributed to GLBJ’s handling of local clients had to do with the agency itself, especially Account Services, which he felt “promised too much to clients,” therefore setting up both sides for potential disappointment. Similar sentiment was expressed by the assistant executive creative director mentioned previously during the initial phase

of my research. During an interview with him, he adamantly stated that part of the problem was advertising professionals being “really spineless” with clients, and not putting in real attempts to understand both China and clients’ needs *now*. For according to him, not much could be learned on either side (agency or client) if the agency did not seriously take into consideration the way their local clients operated.

As mentioned above, an important characteristic of creativity as it was defined at GLBJ was its identification with “originality”. This understanding was impressed on me through the numerous instances when I was told that local clients seemed risk adverse and too prone to being safe in their choices of advertising ideas, such as was the case during lunch one day with Ling and a few of the other female account planning staff. Sitting around a large round table in the back room of a restaurant specializing in Xinjiang-style food, Ling made the comment of how unrealistic she felt advertisements depicting three generation “happy families” (*xingfu jiating*) to be.⁴⁰ “I don’t think this is what people want.” As she spoke, both Joyce and Hannah bobbed their heads in agreement, subsequently stating how unrealistic they feel this advertisement is in regard to real life, as they themselves demonstrated by being single working women, who, like Joyce raised a child on her own, and Hannah, who, although filial, highly valued her independence from her family. Their comments seemed to echo the dialogue described to open this chapter concerning the China Mobile T-ZONE advertisement, in particular the head of account planning’s disdain of the “happy person” motif used. Initially, such comments caught me off guard, as I struggled to understand what was so “bad” about the advertisements in question.

⁴⁰ Three generation families are what are known in Chinese as *si-er-yi* (four-two-one) families, where grandparents, parents, and single children all live together in one household, and in theory, harmoniously. This issue has been the subject of recent anthropological investigation, most recently Vanessa L. Fong’s study on “singletons,” or single children born in China after the implementation of the one-child policy in 1979 (Fong 2004; Davis and Harrell 1993; Croll et al. 1985).

A Lack of Strategic Thinking

In October 2005, *The Economist* published a report called “Business China,” which included the statement “Chinese firms at home keenly recognize the competitive value of brand and effective leadership” (*The Economist* 2005: 1).

Immediately following this statement was the following,

Brand is the major competitive advantage cited by 49% of [the] surveyed executives from domestic Chinese companies, followed closely by effective leadership (45%). China’s corporate leaders are not looking for answers on strategic direction from international management gurus—the latter impress only 5% of respondents. Instead, 67% pick up ideas for strategic initiatives from rivals and 66% from the industry leaders. There is an over-reliance on proven formulae, which exacerbates a dependency cycle of copying rather than innovating (*The Economist* 2005: 1-2).⁴¹

When viewing what might be thought of as “mainstream” Chinese advertising, that is, advertising produced in China for domestic clients, it is common to encounter the repetition of ideas from one advertiser to the next (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). Such similarity is such a common feature in fact that it is often difficult to distinguish one manufacturer’s product from another. From the perspective of employees at GLBJ and other multinational advertising agencies, this similarity is exactly what led many to believe that local clients lacked creativity. In the world of advertising, work is aimed at providing a client with the clearest presentation of an object (product or service) in relation to an idea. But what makes an advertisement unique or “creative” is the “take” one has on an idea, since it is very rarely the case

⁴¹ Unfortunately, the identity/ties of the author(s) of this report is unknown to me, although I did try to locate the(ir) name(s) through online searches. The only authorial citation I could locate was that provided by the magazine, stated as *The Economist Intelligence Unit*.

that an idea in use has never been broached before. Because this is so, what becomes essential is not so much an idea as much as the way an idea is rendered, so as to illuminate what is, in theory, never before encountered aspects of the thing being advertised.



Figure 3: Photograph of an advertisement for Yufu Jewellery. Photography by Kimberly Couvson



Figure 4: Photograph of an advertisement for Inner Mongolia Yili Industrial Group Company Limited's milk products displaying a similar style and "happy" motif as portrayed in the Yufu Jewellery advertisement. Photograph by Kimberly Couvson

Such thinking—both in the form of employees' comments and theory concerning creativity in advertising—reveal what William Mazzarella writes regarding the production of advertising in post-reform India (Mazzarella 2003). In his analysis of the making of an advertising campaign for the "premium" brand condom *Karma Sutra* (Mazzarella 2003: 69), Mazzarella points out how the launch of this campaign marked a watershed moment in and for India. According to his interlocutors, those advertising professionals who worked on the campaign, the advertisements were of significance because of their ability to give consumers what they

supposedly really wanted—depictions of condoms as associated with fun rather than duty. As he explains, what set these advertisements apart from others of their kind was their aesthetic positioning of the condom as something other than what dominant social and cultural discourse (i.e., governmental) proclaimed about condoms. However, Mazzarella does not stop there. What makes his analysis of this campaign valuable is his attention to the positioning of advertising professionals in relation to their clients. Like me, Mazzarella also worked with the localized agents of transnational advertising, and as he indicates, a primary aim of these agents has been to bring a revitalized understanding of advertising to their clientele, a clientele often imagined as trapped in the contours of a time gone by.

India, like China, was once the province of a centrally-planned economy, but since the early 1980s has undergone a social transformation between what Mazzarella calls a “developmentalist to consumerist dispensation” (Mazzarella 2003: 71). This dispensation is akin to the Indian state’s adoption of a market-based strategy of national development. Yet as he argues, even with policies in place ensuring the transition from planned to market economy, discrepancies between the “rhetoric of the consumerist agenda” (i.e., capitalist) and actual reality continued to exist (Mazzarella 2003: 71). According to him, Indian advertising producers overcame this issue as a result of the deregulation of media, especially television, made possible by government reforms and interests in securing the support of newly emergent, affluent “middle classes,” which allowed for a more open interpretation of the way communication mediums popularized the economic changes taking place and their effects on citizens’ lives.

...by the early 1980s the old discourse of national development was increasingly coming into conflict with the consumerist agenda that was being offered to the ascendant “middle classes.” As a result, Indira’s [Ghandi] last

years in office saw the government taking what amounted to contradictory positions vis-à-vis consumerism. On the one hand, the desires of the new “middle classes” were acknowledge and even encouraged. On the other hand, advertising, as the visible face of consumerism, came under new attack for promoting “false needs.” What from one point of view might be read as the desperate rhetorical zigzagging of a government trying to appeal to incommensurable interests could also be interpreted as a strategic compromise. By the early 1980s, after all, the government knew that the private sector would be grateful for whatever liberalizing reforms it saw fit to introduce. In return, the government could expect to ventriloquate the new pro-consumerist discourse through the private sector, and in particular the media industries, thereby keeping enough strategic distance from this discourse to maintain electoral credibility with less affluent but numerically preponderant voters (Mazzarella 2003: 75-76).

China’s own experiment with economic reform shares many of the same features as that experienced by India—media reform and the rise of “middle classes” (Lee et al. 2000; Davis et al. 2000; Wang 2008; Liu 2002)—including governmental ambiguity over market-led development. However, unlike India, China’s economic reforms have had no substantial effect on government, other than to make the Communist Party defensive of its position as dictator of Chinese moral economy (Kahn 2006). While a constant iteration of the notion of democracy by the Communist Party exists, no political fragmentation as described by Mazzarella to have occurred in India has taken place in China, even though the government has actively courted ties to the private sector. Doing so has not, however, prevented the government from being leery of business’ influence on how citizens live their lives, which has been viewed as a challenge to its own hegemony.

Therefore, whereas in India advertising benefited from the effects of economic reform on politics, as state, commercial and citizen interests have increasingly come to coincide, the same cannot be said of China. In China, no explicit “strategic compromise” or pact exists between government, business and consumers. But like India, China’s government does expect to “ventriloquate pro-consumerist discourse through the private sector...in particular media industries” so as to maintain a sense of credibility with citizens. And much of this happens because the majority of businesses in China are at least partially state-owned, with business owners themselves often loyal Party members eager to cater to the aims of the state rather than consumers (Wang 2008; Nolan 2001). But the more I thought about this issue of creativity, the more I was struck by the possibility that perhaps what agency employees were responding to had to do more with how local clients defined “creativity” as having to do with the “self” than with otherness.

Creativity as “taste”

In order to explain what I mean, let me recall a conversation I had in late September 2008 during my return trip to GLBJ. On a wet and rainy morning a week before I was due to leave Beijing, I found myself standing in front of the reception desk in GLBJ’s main waiting area. It had been two and a half years since my last visit, and I had come that day to speak with one of the agency’s executive creative directors. After notifying the executive creative director’s secretary of my arrival, I was given a visitor’s sticker (not a badge, but a sticker) and told to go upstairs. The person I had come to meet was a sprightly middle-aged Chinese woman, originally from Hong Kong. Unfamiliar to me from my previous stay with the agency, this executive creative director had only recently rejoined GLBJ after having worked with

the agency in the 1990s, and then leaving Beijing to open her own production business before finding her way back into advertising.

Our conversation revolved around a number of issues which had come up for me during my first tenure at GLBJ, but in particular that of creativity. As we spoke, I found myself settling into an easy rapport with this woman, on account of how she seemed to welcome my questions with thoughtful responses. Sitting at her desk, she explained to me that she often found herself working on local client requests which required her to follow the client's "taste". By her reference to "taste," the executive creative director (ECD) was clarifying a question I had raised about the influence of client briefs on the direction advertising took on. Below is an excerpt from my interview with her in which she both reveals and expounds on this point.

Kimberly: So...do you think that maybe...creativity in advertising is not as creative as it could be, because of the fact, you know, you're bound to follow...

(At this point the executive creative director speaks over me as she gets my point, and tries to guess how I will finish my question)

ECD: The client?

Kimberly: The brief?

ECD: *Yeah. Of course.* We have...we have to follow the client's, um...taste.

ECD: Um, not just their intention, I would say taste, actually.

(The ECD's response elicits a small laugh from me, my trepidation at asking it begins to dissipate)

Kimberly: Okay, okay.

(My laughter causes her to laugh as she reiterates the point she has just made)

ECD: Not intention, I would say 'taste'.

Kimberly: Okay.

ECD: I mean, still...still we can be better...[long pause]...and...ah...I think it [local client advertising creativity] has to do with a lot of different reasons.

Kimberly: Okay.

(A long pause here as she thinks about what “reasons”)

ECD: Reason being, um...[long pause]...it’s such a complicated question.

Actually, reason being, like the economy, the client, the marketers, the whole thing I, so...I would say, it [local client advertising creativity] hasn’t, it’s not, it hasn’t, it’s sort of like a fruit who [sic] is not ripened...

(Not sure if I fully understand the point she is trying to make I utter the word “okay” a bit quizzically, but she seems to take no notice of my partial confusion and continues to speak, laughing as she does so as if humored by a joke I have not yet been let in on)

ECD: ...but it has to be a fruit, you know what I’m saying ...

(Laughing as I vigorously take notes)

ECD: More...and then it has to pretend to have ripened, ‘I am ready,’ but actually it’s not ready. So, so, everything is not ready, but you have to make it.

Kimberly: Yes. That seems like it’s really hard, actually.

ECD: Yeah, yeah. I think that’s the whole thing that makes advertising into such a[s] state...of development.

(Her phone begins to ring in the background as we speak, prompting her to briefly interrupt her comments to take a call)

At this point, let me step back from this conversation, for a number of interesting insights appear as a result of my inquiry. First among these insights is what the executive creative director said about creativity being influenced by not just the client, but a multitude of factors, like the economy, other marketers, and the advertising industry itself, which in her view all ultimately influence local advertising

creativity, making it like a “fruit who [*sic*] is not ripened” but “has to pretend to have ripened.” China’s rapid economic growth has resulted in what has been observed as a frenzied attempt on the part of many Chinese, both collectives and individuals, to overcome an actual lack of familiarity with newly emerging practices in society by adopting western capitalist practices as society swings from a planned to market-based system.

Wanting to prove knowledgeable about the new system settling into place, personages and institutions often contract with those entities claiming expertise about the system, only to encounter different understandings of the object for which knowledge is sought. This difference of understanding leads me to the second insight concerning creativity arising from my dialogue with the executive creative director—the issue of the “big boss,” an issue illuminated below. Turning back to the interview, where I pick up our conversation is a point where the ECD and I have engaged in a discussion of the development of advertising practice in China in terms of styles and theories used in its production over the past three decades. Her responses are elicited as a result of my question to understand what the nature and potential cause of this development might be.

Kimberly: How much can we really say Chinese advertising has developed?

ECD: It’s a complicated thing.

ECD: So, so, so it...it...it involves whether...ah...the marketers, the talents we *have*, the receptive level, the values of the society, the aesthetic trends...

ECD: I mean a lot of things. I mean, we always, actually, I personally, I...I always have to fight, strik[e]...figh[t]...between the balance of, I mean, getting something you really think is right, and...having the client’s approved [*sic*] on it...which is tough.

Kimberly: What do you think tends to make it so difficult?

Kimberly: I mean...would you say,...it's...it's...it's a...and I hate to use this expression, but a, a *China* thing? That, like, a cultural thing that...that causes that, or because it's the nature of the business? Because you're constantly having to please someone else's taste?

ECD: Um...to a certain extent [that it's the nature of the business], and the fact that if we look at a lot of [long pause]...a lot of company...ah... ...if you look at a lot, a lot of local company, a lot of local company have got their big boss.

Kimberly: Um hmm.

ECD: And their big boss generally is ah...[long pause] is around fifty-something...has undergone a lot of hardship...

(I utter a little laugh at the ECD's mention of "hardship" due to how she places stress on the word, as she, herself, cannot help but laugh at the use of the word)

ECD: ...very, extremely hard, [more laughter] harder than anyone can imagine. And then, and then they make it. So they often...the times they tend to look at advertising as something...to sort of express...what their visions are. (I quizzically utter the word "okay" in response to what she has said but she seems to miss the tone of my response and at this point she continues to talk in the vein of a local client's "vision")

ECD: So I'm being ambiguous [realizing she has said this word by mistake, corrects herself]...I'm being ambitious. I'm like an eagle. I have to be...ah...ah...standing on top of the mountain, so you see...actually...quite a lot of advertising is like this.

Kimberly: "Yes. That's very true."

ECD: It's...it's because the *boss*...use[s] advertising, a lot of money to tell the

people [consumers] [pause]...*who I am*. And they don't see the piece of advertising as a marketing tool to communicate what their company or what their products are going to offer.

ECD: And, ah...which makes, makes the whole thing quite complicated.

ECD: And, and...

(At this point I volunteer a conclusion to her comment)

Kimberly: Almost like a conflict of interests, then?

ECD: Yes. It is a conflict of interests. It's...it's...it's something which I...I don't think can be resolved...until this sort of generation of [business] leaders...

Kimberly: ...passes through.

ECD: "Passes through [she repeats my phrase in a very upbeat manner]. And then the young, the younger ones, the younger generation comes up...because they [current generation of business leaders] will still say 'I want *da* (big) *qi* (air)'.

(The ECD places emphasis on the tones of these words as she speaks).

ECD: 'I want to be grand'.

As the executive creative director explained, many local client companies are headed by an individual in his mid-fifties, which is significant for the fact that this individual is someone who would have experienced the high tide of socialism in China, roughly identified as the ten-year period known as the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Such individuals are those who are old enough to remember and have lived through the Cultural Revolution, a period of massive social upheaval and extreme turmoil in which young Chinese men and women were raised on the propagation of radical political ideology. These individuals constitute what Lisa Rofel refers to as China's "Lost Generation" of citizens (Rofel 1996), who in exchange for

their loyalty to Mao and the making of communist revolution, “lost,” in the sense of being denied, the opportunity for education or any of the other pursuit formally sanctioned by the dictates of traditional Chinese society, but gained in exchange an overwhelming sense of idealism about the future. This is why the executive creative director’s comments about the notion of “hardship” carries significance in the way it, hardship, was viewed as influencing an advertisement’s aesthetic design.

As stated, what stands as important for a local client is not “advertising as a marketing tool to communicate what their company or what their products are going to offer” consumers, but that the advertisements instead indicate how one has “made it,” found success, even though one’s personal experience of hardship suggests the opposite (never finding success) is the more likely scenario. Hence, this broader cultural experience helps to explain the executive creative director’s emphasis on the idea that the purpose of advertising carried a different meaning than that offered by the agency for local clients.

But of even greater importance is what she said about a boss’ “vision,” in particular her comments about local clients’ desire for “big air” (*da qi*), and the fact that many local advertisers did not, at least as of 2005, “target” audiences in the way advertising professionals felt the advertising being produced for them should. Such comments echo what the vice-president of advertising stated in his interview excerpt—the idea that what is important is for advertising to appeal to “mass tastes,” therefore exposing yet another moment in which discrepancies between agency and client emerge over how advertising is differently imagined as functioning. Rather than focus a message on the product or service for sale, according to the executive creative director, much of the local advertising for which she and her staff were commissioned to produce instead is designed, on account of the client’s “taste,” to send a message of “who I am” to consumers, a personal narrative viewed as not in line with consumer

interests. A way to potentially understand why this is so is suggested by recent ethnographic writing about the historicized embodiment of interests and desires.

In her book *Appetites: Food and Sex in Postsocialist China*, Judith Farquhar (2002) notes that since the 1990s, “consumerism” is “not at all socialist and” is “quite inimical to Maoism,” and that the “indulgence of appetites is a highly visible, even flamboyant, aspect of a growing consumer regime” (Farquhar 2002: 3). What is interesting about Farquhar’s argument in regard to local client advertising is the way she points out how being an individual has trumped collective aspiration. For consumers are not the only ones looking to express themselves, but as the executive creative director suggests. Also interested in expressing themselves are Chinese clients, in the form of individual bosses, who in the act of doing so, ignore the chance to communicate and connect with consumers in a way that is important to consumers’ tastes, interests, desires, et cetera. As a means of elaborating this point, I turn one final time to what the ECD explained regarding the influence of individual preference on the style and aesthetics of local client advertising. I pick up the conversation at the point where the last comment made by the ECD recorded preceding this brief explanatory section left off concerning the matter of “big air”.

(Highly intrigued by her comments, all I can utter is “hmm,” as I have not expected this reaction but hope she will continue to say more, which she does repeating the phrase so I get the idea, but laughing as she does so)

ECD: *Da qi. Da qi, da qi* is ‘big air’.

(Nodding my head in agreement, I quickly say “yes...yes,” as the ECD, still laughing continues to repeat the phrase “big air”)

ECD: Big air!

(Finding her laughter infectious, I, myself, begin to laugh as her multiple iterations of the phrase “big air” has helped to drive home her point of what

she thinks is most characteristic of local client advertising)

Kimberly: Oh...okay.

(The ECD continues to laugh, laughing harder than before, which causes her to utter something in Chinese, which is unintelligible)

ECD: It's big air! It has to be grand! If you look [at the] Olympics ceremonies, opening...Grand! Big! Ambitious!

Kimberly: Yes...yes.

(Laughing a bit less robustly, the ECD continues her commentary about Chinese creativity)

ECD: Ambitious. So, so still I think a lot of local companies have this feudal, *fengjian* system.⁴²

ECD: I mean...I mean the emperor is there, but we never see the emperor...and a lot of people, a lot of...um...ah...ah...ah...people working under him, have to get what, what his mind's at.

(Her comments cause me to listen intently to every word which comes out of her mouth)

ECD: And sometimes the advertising agency hasn't got the chance to see [him]. We see him once, maybe properly in the pitch, if we win the pitch, and then he says 'yes, yes' [she says this in a dismissive sort of way to mimic the behavior of the "boss"], and he left everything to his subordinates, and everything just muck around...merry-go-round...blah, blah, blah...

Kimberly: Um hmm.

ECD: ...and then eventually we find out that actually what he wants to do is...use a piece of advertising to express his vision...

Kimberly: Umm.

⁴² *Fengjian* is the Chinese word for feudal or feudalism.

ECD: ...or his hardship.

(Once again the ECD has begun to laugh at the use of the phrase “hardship”)

(At this point the ECD is still laughing)

ECD: Which is quite funny...which is quite funny if you look at it. It's not...it's not advertising...it relates to history...development...”

Kimberly: Yeah...yeah...yeah. That's a really interesting perspective, I think on, on thinking about...

(As I speak, the ECD cuts me off and continues speaking about “big bosses” in a tone more serious than adopted in the past few minutes)

ECD: Because I've seen it. I've met...like...quite a lot of them. And eventually I...I...I have [to] make...every time I've met this kind of local business...ah...entrepreneur, I will request him. I have to see him in person [laughing as she says this]. I have to know exactly what he wants to do! Because otherwise it will be just a waste of time.”

Kimberly: Yeah, because you're constantly guessing and trying to...

ECD: Yeah! It's just a waste of time. You have to win his trust, when he says yes...that's it.

(She pauses and neither of us speaks before she resumes speaking, returning to my original question)

ECD: So...so...I think now it's getting slightly better...but because in the past they always say ‘I want...ah, a *slogan*. A slogan. It's sort of like a Communist Party prog...propaganda, sort of, I want to say, I want ‘*yi ju hua*. *That line*’ (she draws these two words out as she says them).⁴³

Kimberly: Yes.

⁴³ The phrase *yi ju hua* in Chinese carries the meaning of “a sentence,” or as the executive creative director stated, “a line” such as a line in a story or an advertising slogan.

ECD: Yeah...yeah...yeah. It's history...so, so...it's a long story to tell
(Once again she begins to laugh).

ECD: "It's an interesting topic, actually."

In the executive creative director's opinion, creativity of a "grand," "big," or "ambitious" nature—be it an eagle or standing atop a mountain—is not what the country needs, such as her example of the Olympic ceremony demonstrated, because it is too "feudal," the idea that everyone should strive for the same thing, for herein rest a central tension between creativity as GLBJ defined it, and creativity as local clients defined it. Such an understanding of local client creativity is echoed by Jing Wang who, writing about Chinese corporate culture, argues that "corporate storytelling is central to the mythmaking" of many Chinese businesses, from the perspective of the CEO "erstwhile sent-down youths during the [Cultural] Revolution...who have relied on the power of narrative to give their corporations a distinct and often dramatic personality" (Wang 2008: 148; brackets mine). Continuing her explication, Wang writes that because of this emphasis on personal narrative, "Chinese corporate strongmen [the executive creative director's "big boss"] treat their companies as a personal patrimony, a possession in line with the medieval concept of *dominium*" (Wang 2008: 154-55). However, is this enough of a reason to understand why the executive creative director, as she recounted her experiences, so often felt the compulsion to laugh? And was it local client creativity itself she was laughing at, as so seems to be the case, or something else?

Creativity as cultural value

As my data and the secondary literature on Chinese advertising I have drawn on indicate, local clients often approached requests for branding and advertising based on both emulation of competitors and on the basis of a desire to see one's own

personal tastes, rather than consumers' tastes (as revealed through research) reflected in the branding and advertising produced. For GLBJ employees, these types of requests inevitably resulted in "non-creative" advertising, because of the fact that the same foundational logic was being used as advertisements which already existed, making such requests antithetical to employees' understandings of creativity. Besides promoting creativity, in the form of branding, as a tool which could help its clients to better compete in the battle for consumers and market share, GLBJ and its employees also promoted creativity as a cultural value. As a result, doing so was something akin to how one encounters creativity and its pair, innovation, discussed in the context of democratic capitalist social systems, in particular that of the United States.

On the surface, presenting creativity in this manner is not odd, especially considering that the market in which GLBJ plies its trade is *essentially* capitalist (Naughton 1999). However, the major difference between China and other capitalist-oriented economies is that *politically*, China remains under the rule of a single-party, and is not a pluralistic democracy in the manner of the United States or India. A plurality of voices in business does not yet exist in China to challenge the dominant interests of the state, nor dominant interpretations of concepts or ideas of how business should be managed, therefore leaving little room at the moment for the introduction of alternative ideologies.

Rather than see local client requests as a specific mode of being creative, agency employees instead continued to read these requests as a failure of the Chinese individual to properly understand the premises under which creativity is possible. But I do not believe this to be the case, and argue that it is actually the opposite is true. It is not so much that local clients did not value creativity, they simply did not value it in the same manner or under the same terms as those suggested by GLBJ. Or in the terms

set by the government concerning the nature of Chinese creativity, which the Party imagines as much closer to the western conceptualization of the concept.

I suggest this difference in the conceptualization of creativity has to do with what Leach writes about creativity as a value in the current economy and its ties to current “regimes of ownership” (Leach 2005 a). As examined in Chapter Three, China’s government now actively embraces a discourse of development that posits creativity as a key force of socio-economic growth. This discourse, concerning “creativity as a driver” of development (Keane 2007), has its origins in Euro-American thought on the sustainability of the capitalist mode of production. Furthermore, because of the expansion of capitalist forms of economic and social relations through globalization, this discourse now amounts to *the* dominant discourse on development.

As such, the definition of creativity at the heart of this discourse is associated with a construction of creativity as bound up in the mind of intellect of certain *individuals*, and is made evident only through the fostering of particular types of situations. This reading of Western-based conceptualizations of creativity is taken from James Leach’s recent work on international cultural property rights discourse in Papua New Guinea (Leach 2004; 2005a; 2005b). In particular, Leach argues that the construction of creativity in the above sense is derived from understandings of how people produce value through their labor in the way Marx argued through his labor theory of value (Leach 2004: 154; Marx 1990). To emphasize this point, Leach writes,

The work of the mind is similarly constituted as abstract by the very conceptualisation of creativity as something into which anyone can tap. It is the work of instantiation which makes distinctions...the fact that creativity is contingent [neither logically necessary nor logically impossible] for any particular person can be managed by facilitating conditions, that is establishing

the right situations in which creativity [a particular kind of intellectual work] can be first expressed, and then exploited...It is a *capacity* some people demonstrate at certain times. The rhetoric is directed at generalising this capacity. In this way, it has been turned into something like the labour potential of a workforce that needs to be tapped through human organization. Labour of the mind is embodied in material outcomes. These can be owned (Leach 2004: 154; emphasis mine, brackets in original).

I draw on this particular reading because of how it helps to encapsulate the idea that creativity and “being creative” (or the act of engaging creativity) is the object of specific forms of cultural knowledge. For as Leach goes on to argue, the Euro-American conceptualization of creativity as innovation constitutes but one “mode” through which creativity as a “mode of action” may be understood (Leach 2004: 152).

Leach comes to this conclusion through analytical comparison between the ways Nekkini-speakers construct their understandings of social relations as a generative process based on the unique combination of people, with recognized definitions of creativity as innovative combination. Taking as an example his experience studying kinship construction among Nekkini-speaking Reite people of the Rai Coast in Papua New Guinea, Leach becomes capable of making the argument that creativity is culturally objectified. This is because, we are told, in the Reite context, creativity is not thought to be embodied in persons, but in forms, and is therefore not contingent on any special circumstances or situations and is always possible, unlike in the Euro-American context where creativity is *always* contingent since it is imagined as an attribute of the person.

When looking back at the topic of creativity as it was discussed in this chapter, it becomes possible to see parallels between what Leach argues, and what I have argued concerning creativity and local clients. To begin, just as Leach contends that

cultural property rights discourse (a global discourse) draws on, promotes, and imposes a Euro-American understanding of creativity on those seeking to utilize its logic as the basis of their claims to products bearing the characteristics of “cultural property,” so, too, does the advertising and branding discourse utilized by GLBJ employees to service their clients. It is in employees’ claims that local clients “lack creativity” that this logic is made most manifest. The reason why, I suggest, is because employees regularly failed to take seriously the mode of creativity local clients tended to work in when requesting advertising and branding from the agency. This mode of creativity had to do with the way local clients valued their ability to lay claim to possessing or owning the *forms* to which creativity is now associated with in China—for example, brands; because of how this relationship helped identify them as modern and in proper possession of the sort of tools necessary for competition in the contemporary, capitalist world.

Paraphrasing Leach, it is now valuable for peoples to value creativity because of how it, creativity, allows for the possible fulfillment of humanity’s potential to develop itself based on the harnessing of creativity as a tool in the form of a talent latent in the minds of persons. Yet as he explains, this is a moralized assessment of how people now view creativity in the contemporary West, specifically the U.K., which serves as the origin of much of this thinking and is a relatively new reading of creativity (see also Chapter Three). However, it is creativity as it is viewed in the West, which has made creativity or being creative of interest to China’s government. But what is tricky about this assessment is that it is also an ontological discourse about being in the world. As China continues to transition away from a planned-economy model, more knowledge is required to help its people to adjust to practices now engaged in, but formulated outside of its own social and cultural system. Businesses, like advertising agencies, offer services identified as crucial to China’s

competitive/developmental potential, on the basis that such services can help Chinese businesses and individuals learn to become like their western counterparts. But even as agencies like GLBJ see Chinese creativity in action, they continue to dismiss and devalue it as not creativity, in part, because of the different cultural logic ingrained in the practice of advertising concerning what creativity is supposed to look like.

Conclusion

In this chapter, my aim has been to focus on a particular discourse about clients at GLBJ as a way of understanding the production of advertising and branding in China. In doing so, I focused on a specific concern agency employees had with what they termed local clients' "lack of creativity," and investigated how "creativity," as a tool only recently promoted as an integral part of China's modernization, and a concept associated with branding, was differently understood and used by the agency and its clients. As my data shows, the sort of creativity offered by GLBJ to its clients, both international and local, was an emergent concept category and social value in 2005-2006, one with its origins in the West, and often in conflict with local rationalizations of the term. The reason why, I explained, had to do with more than just the idea that local clients "did not care to be creative". Through examination of specific insights culled from interviews with GLBJ employees about the operation of local client businesses, it became clear that recent history and the pressure of state-led development are key factors influencing Chinese creativity, as well as personal ambition and the desire to stand as a symbol for success in China.

In the next chapter, I continue the exploration of the issue of agency –client relations, in particular how agency professionals actively practiced branding, through analysis of a branding case study I both undertook and participated in while at GLBJ. My specific focus will be on the development of a corporate branding and advertising

campaign for a domestic consumer electronics company named Qingsong and the issues encountered by the account team assigned to this account.

CHAPTER SIX:

RE-BRANDING THE CLIENT'S IMAGE

“The Request”

In the spring of 2003, a press release was issued by the Chinese consumer electronics manufacturer Qingsong announcing the company's decision to begin production of a new line of innovative consumer goods on the basis of 3C technology. This concept referred to the integration of computer chips into consumer goods for ease of use, and was a shorthand way of expressing the ideas “computer,” “communications,” “consumer electronics”. This decision marked a clear departure on the part of the company from its traditional production efforts, which up to this moment had focused solely on the manufacture of television sets. Now, as indicated by the release, Qingsong intended to diversify its product offerings by expanding into areas of goods production like refrigerators, air conditioners, and even mobile phones. Originally founded as an aircraft machine parts factory in the late 1950s, Qingsong's transformation into a consumer goods manufacturer corresponded directly with the on-set of economic reforms.

Due to its make-up as a state-owned enterprise (SOE), Qingsong early on experienced a large degree of market success, rapidly becoming its industry's leader due to the general lack of competition then in the market and the high concentration of skilled workers it employed. As reform of the economy continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Qingsong's dominance in the market soon came to be challenged as more and more domestic competition entered the picture, a situation induced on account of shifts in policy that effected both employment and business patterns. Even though challenged by the new competition, Qingsong managed to continue to hold

onto its position as industry leader thanks to strong customer sales linked to its early entry and dominance of the market. But such good times were not to last. Part of the rationale generating the company's interest in 3C technology stemmed from this rise in competition. Whereas previously a company such as Qingsong could rely on the fact that it was the *only* producer of consumer goods, such was no longer a possibility given the government's steady push to modernize China by means of the market.

Also contributing to Qingsong's previous strength in sales was the company's use of price, in particular low prices, to attract consumer attention. Use of price as a sales tactic represented a common marketing method for Chinese companies, which in the initial period of reform had helped drive profits by driving sales. But as the new century dawned, reliance on such a method began to be questioned by certain company executives who, even while still utilizing the approach, found both their companies sales and profits falling. For Qingsong, this realization became most evident in 2005, when for the first time in its existence, the company found itself outside the leader position. One consequence of this drop was the fostering of a concerned and sometimes angry reaction from its shareholders.

As a result of this concern, executives quickly took action to determine the cause of the problem, and following a period of investigation, the answer to emerge was that consumers thought the company "old". Of the newer companies which constituted Qingsong's competition, one advantage they were viewed as holding over the company was their inherent newness. Unlike Qingsong, none of these companies, even those, like it, which operated as a reformed SOE, possessed as deep a pedigree as it did. Many of its competitors, like TCL, traced their establishment back only to the early 1980s, whereas Qingsong could trace its establishment back to the early years of

the nation.⁴⁴ This specific lineage, while once an asset, had now become its biggest liability.

It was under these pretenses that Qingsong came to contact GLBJ. Turning to the agency offered what Qingsong executives felt might be a solution to their current woes. Having worked with the agency in the past, company executives were aware of the agency's standard and quality of practice, issues with which executives themselves were concerned. Just as age of the company had emerged as one of the findings of the investigation of company operations, so, too, did that of poor management. Even though production of its goods occurred on the basis of what was widely viewed in its industry as the most "modern" standards, especially research and development (R & D), management of that production was assessed as incomplete, and the reason why was seen as having to do with creativity.

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the making of an advertising campaign for the consumer electronics manufacturer Qingsong in relation to its request to re-brand its image among Chinese consumers. As indicated in the description above, this request hinged on a number of factors ranging from the relative age of Qingsong's brand in conjunction with that of the company, to its management capabilities. Ultimately, what motivates my examination of this campaign is a desire to further develop an understanding of the way advertising and branding now serve the nation in China. Such an understanding is possible, when we take into consideration the way Chinese companies, seeking modernization through adoption of the latest notions associated with management practice, turn to service providers, like advertising agencies, for

⁴⁴ http://www.tcl.com/main_en/About%20TCL/History/index.shtml?ctalogId=13048. Accessed 8 October 2009.

help in making that modernity a reality. In examining the manner in which this campaign was made, I take into consideration the influence of contemporary discourse surrounding ideas of competitiveness in China as a key factor contributing to Qingsong's turn to branding. In doing so, I examine how this discourse is focused on notions concerning the importance of creativity, in the form of brands and their advertising, as an input to innovation, and how these ideas ultimately contribute to understandings of modernity. From there I then turn back to a discussion of Qingsong's campaign by describing the account team assigned to handle it and the steps involved to coordinate its branding efforts with the launch of the company's new line of products.

Reformulating the Management of Reform

Why do Companies Brand?

In response to the question of why companies brand, William Mazzarella argues that companies brand as a means of extracting profit from intimate relationships (Mazzarella 2003: 186). This comprehension of branding appears in relation to his study of the adoption of branding as a practice in India by domestic companies, and the way notions of brands and branding took root there in the late 1990s. While what ultimately led him to this conclusion was his experience tracking the production of an advertising campaign by the agency where he was situated as a participant-observer, equally important to his understanding were marketing texts devoted to the subject. Texts of this nature play a significant role in his theory of brands, which states that because of their basic function as "prosthetic personalities," brands build relationships through a notion of "keeping-while-giving," and do so by serving as reflections of what customers state are needs in their lives (Mazzarella

2003). Of particular importance to the development of Mazarella's theory is the work of David Aaker, the American professor of marketing mentioned in Chapter Four.

According to Aaker, companies *must* brand if they are to properly manage their fortunes, both in terms of profits and in terms of existence, and many do so primarily as a means to "resist the pressure to compete largely on price" (Aaker 1993: 2). This is because of how a brand, as a "virtual identity system" as professionals at GLBJ often referred to remarked, identify and work as a "strategic asset that is key to [the] long-term performance" of a company in the market (Aaker 1996: vii). This rendering of the logic of brands appears in the preface of a text in what has now become an essential part of anthropologists' interpretations of branding as a global phenomenon. But this argument, which appears in Aaker's work *Building Strong Brands*, actually has its origins in one of his earlier works on the topic of brand equity and the way brands add value to its owner (Aaker 1993). Brand equity, readers come to learn, is what consumers perceive as "the value added to the functional product or service by associating it with a brand name," and according to this assessment the way that value is developed is through a company's advertising (Aaker 1993: 2).

As a component of business management practice, the use of brands is not new, but instead stems from earlier trademark practices engaged in by merchants as a way to identify and signal the quality of their products to consumers (Mazarella 2003). Over time, this practice evolved into the current system of branding recognizable today. In its most current form, branding also constitutes what theories of business management and development see as an important factor in the way companies and countries compete (Schonberger 1990; Yusuf et al. 2006). According to Richard Schonberger, this is done through the simple principle of "serving the customer" (Schonberger 1990). Utilizing Aaker's theory of brand equity and brands as assets helps us to grasp why this is so. According to Aaker, beginning in the 1980s,

members of the financial community in the United States, and subsequently elsewhere, began to place high price value on established brands, “treating them as intangible assets with the potential to grow in value rather than depreciate” (Aaker 1993). This transformation of the notion of brand from that of functional signifier, soon worked its way into a more general economic discourse about “competitiveness” as barriers protecting national markets began to fall due to the widespread institutionalization of structural adjustment policies (Edelman and Haugerud 2005). As protections fell, competition in markets around the globe rose as a result of globalization. Because consumer markets now offered more choices, attracting consumers’ attention became harder. And in order for companies to survive in these changed environments, many began to search for a way to defend their sales and profits. One tactic devised to do so was to turn what previously had been viewed by companies as a part of their businesses not needing management—the company name.

In the case of China, this more general process of the rise of competition also began in the 1980s, as efforts undertaken by the government to satisfy WTO entry requirements lead to the lowering of trade barriers. But even as the government worked to lower access barriers to international companies, it also simultaneously encouraged the development of a more robust domestic market by allowing for the establishment of a more diversified enterprise system in part to keep up with the logic of the modernization discourse it had adopted (Yusuf et al. 2006). All of this change occurred in accordance with the goal of making China more competitive once all trade barriers came down in 2005 (Keane 2007). By the time of my fieldwork, this most recent understanding as brand as a business management tool had made its way into China, with rising competition serving as the catalyst. Yet general adoption of this logic was still far from the norm, as evidenced by my discussion of the marketing practices of Chinese businesses in the preceding chapter.

Based on what was told to me by my informants at GLBJ, this was, for the most part, due to the fact that most companies viewed brands not for the purpose of building relationships, but instead as short-term sales devices for triggering sales and profits. Little strategy seemed to go into the thinking behind the adoption of a brand, which for many advertising practitioners, was thought to account for their general lack of effect in the market. However, not all Chinese companies behaved in this manner. As I explain in the next section, Qingsong's approach to its current business practices reflected more of the logic of branding mentioned above. But even with the adoption of this newer logic, older belief systems continued to hold sway, illustrating yet another instance of the functional contradictions of cultural practice under late-socialism. This understanding is reflected in my description of the branding process below.

How to Attract Consumers

At the heart of Qingsong's request for branding was the notion of innovation. This understanding was made evident through the company's insistence that all advertising—print, televisual, and point-of-purchase (POP)—make use of the concept of 3C.⁴⁵ This concept has its origins in the field of computer parts manufacturing, and is the result of what observers of this particular market noted in the early 2000s as a growing convergence between the way people use computers and the way they communicate. “3C” first gained usage in Taiwan, as maturation of consumer markets, specifically business-to-business (B2B), on the island forced computer parts manufacturers there to devise new strategies for positioning their brand of products. Knowledge of the concept spread to China shortly after Taiwanese manufacturers

⁴⁵ The term “point-of-purchase” (POP), refers to advertising in the form of cardboard cut-outs, flyers, pamphlets, or any other type of media which appears at a location where a specific product is retailed.

shifted the site of production from Taiwan to mainland China due to the mainland's lower production costs and abundance of factories.

While well-seasoned as a marketing and design concept in use abroad, 3C represented the cutting edge in China at the time of Qingsong's press release and subsequent branding. As a company, Qingsong possessed a rather unique characteristic among Chinese manufacturers, for unlike many of its competitors, Qingsong had long engaged in acts of innovation. Contributing to this process was its identity as a factory formerly embedded into China's military-industrial complex under Mao. In this earlier instantiation as a machine parts factory for the air force, Qingsong's predecessor served as a key site for research into the advancement and design of technologies deemed integral to the nation's defense and welfare. As such, an engagement in research as a factor for the design of its products was from an early point in its history deeply ingrained in the psyche of its workers. But even with these practices in place, Qingsong still experienced falling sales. One main reason discovered why had to do with its image among consumers.

While clearly innovative in terms its products' design, what Qingsong had failed to realize was the effect knowledge of its identity as a SOE had on consumers' opinions of the brand. As indicated in the opening to this chapter, prior to coming to GLBJ, Qingsong's primary form of marketing strategy focused on the use of price, which led to a general neglect and detriment of its true image as an innovator. Because this method reflected the moves of so many other producers in the market, lack of differentiation had come to hurt the company. Plus, adding to this fact was the lack of a sense of unity between the advertising of its products and the company itself. For most of its history, one major feature of life under the People's Republic has been the presence of state-owned enterprises. Originally founded as the primarily institutions of production of the socialist state, such enterprises held the responsibility

of manufacturing the goods to meet citizens primary needs. But due to the turn to the market in order to develop the country, that which constituted the notion of a basic need began to change, as citizens gained increasing access to goods that had been unknown under Mao (Davis 2000). As Davis writes,

Chairman Mao Zedong was not gone two years when his successors jettisoned core principles of the Communist revolution and assigned private entrepreneurship and consumer demand central roles in a new blueprint for economic growth. Initially these deviations from Maoist orthodoxy were endorsed as short-term compromises to spur efficiency and jump start a stagnant economy...however, by the early 1990s, when the initial reform had produced a decade of double-digit growth and ensconced Chinese industry firmly within the global capitalist economy, the leadership discovered that they could not reverse course. Neither could they control the social consequences of the economy's dependency on market transactions...millions of daily commercial exchanges not only calibrated the flow of material goods; they also nurtured individual desires...that challenged official discourse and conventions. The political regime remained [sic] intact, but relationships between agents of the state and ordinary citizens have changed (Davis 2000: 1).

One consequence of this shift in market relations between manufacturers and citizens is that consumers have come to demand better quality items than those initially provided by the state. "Quality" was a constant term encountered during my field research, primarily in relation to the reasons why people made the purchasing choices they did. Rather than be satisfied by just having a product, as was often the case in the early period of reforms, consumer preferences have developed over time to a point where more demand is placed on a product having not only functionality, but better

quality in the form of innovations in features as well as function. SOEs, by-and-large have not been associated with these qualities, mainly due to their continued control by the state, rather than the market. Such a situation has been viewed as problematic for companies, because of the continuing pressure placed on management within these enterprises to ignore general market signs that contribute to growth, and instead focus production targets on ideas which have shown success, but offer little opportunity for more (Yusuf et al. 2006). As a result, SOEs have come to be viewed by consumers as stodgy, and out-of-step with the current moment. In order for Qingsong to break out of this conceptual framework, what was needed was a reformulation of its identity as an SOE.

Tapping into 3C: Revisiting Qingsong's Request for Branding

A Little Background

Having now foregrounded for readers in fuller detail the nature of the issues giving rise to Qingsong's decision to turn to branding as a marketing strategy, in this section I now focus on the process surrounding the making of the advertising campaign for the product launch at the heart of the company's re-branding attempts. In doing so, I present this process as a series of episodes during which the account team assigned to service Qingsong met to formulate the strategy used in the campaign. Considering that branding is, by its very nature, a rather long and drawn-out affair—in the case of this particular study, eight months—and for the sake of aiding readers' comprehension of events, I present this process in the form of edited field journal entries, only providing analysis at the point where my notes, and consequently, my knowledge of and involvement in the campaign came to an end. In its design,

Qingsong's campaign was to extend over a period of three years, starting in 2006 and ending in 2008.

The central message to be communicated by the advertising produced was that of "living a creative life now," and the creative work was to be developed around the notion of the 3C technology inherent in Qingsong's new product design. The ultimate goal of the re-brand was to convince consumers that contrary to popular perception, Qingsong was, in fact, a source of the innovation many consumers craved. A series of tactics was developed by the account team to help turn around Qingsong's brand image problems, which are described below. However, before engaging in this description, I first introduce how I came to be involved in the making of the campaign, as well as the various agency employees who comprised the team.

The Account Team

I first became acquainted with the campaign, the account team, and client in mid-October, not long after the agency received Qingsong's request. At this point in time, I had only just begun to gain an idea of how GLBJ functioned as a service provider due to what had been my brief involvement in a "consulting" project for a foreign beer company interested in the habits and mentality of Chinese beer drinkers. What had initially been my hope to use this project as a basis for understanding the production of advertising in China quickly vanished, as the hoped for request never materialized. Subsequent attempts on my part to locate a new account for this purpose met with similar dead-ends until one day I received an invitation to attend a series of meetings aimed at the production of a new brand image for a client.

It was during the course of these initial meeting that I got to know the members of the team. Altogether, the account team assembled was made up of eleven employees from each of the core disciplines within the agency--one account planner,

six employees from Account Services, and four employees from Creative Services. Such a combination was common practice at GLBJ, and illustrated a principle of practice at the agency which emphasized combining different forms of expertise as a way to assessing the various problems and issues associated with a client's brand. All of the employees assigned to this account were native mainland Chinese, primarily male with the exception of a female account executive. And minus my involvement, no other foreigner was actively involved in the account.

Of the employees from Account Services, included was the business director, as well as the vice-president of advertising, introduced to readers in Chapter Two, and an account director, a late-twenty-something man from Sichuan, who, unlike almost everyone else, was one of only two non-Beijingers on the team. His work was supported by an account manager, another young man and an account executive, newly hired by the agency when the campaign began. The creative director overseeing the account was a local employee of mild-acclaim. He had been responsible for the development of a highly successful set of advertisements promoting the services of one of the country's two major phone companies, and as a result had gained a reputation for being a "creative thinker". But what made him valuable to the team was his experience working on projects for other consumer electronics providers. The remainder of his creative team, all of whom highly respected him for his work, an art director and associate creative director were also male.

Beginnings

My rationale for including the following field journal entry stemming from mid-October corresponds with its description of an important meeting between the account team and representatives from Qingsong. The particular focus of this entry is

that of the presentation of the team's initial positioning strategy for the company and the company's response.

First Meeting

Today has been extremely busy for everyone involved in the Qingsong re-brand primarily due to the client's visit to the office in the evening and earlier meeting to discuss the current brand positioning developed by the Mark (account planner) and Steven (account director). The first meeting took place in the afternoon, in the large meeting room on the Creative Services floor across from the main doors at 4:19pm, and lasted for about an hour and a half, and during it everyone was asked to give their opinions about the branding concept currently in the works to what's being called Qingsong's "mother brand". It made sense to hold the meeting here, since so many people are involved in making this account.

Mark started the meeting off with a presentation of a set of slides (what is called a "deck") in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, all of which focus on the mapping of the concept of the Chinese family over time. Three categories are discussed in relation to this issue: the traditional family (*chuantong de jia*), the contemporary family (*dangdai de jia*), and the future family (*weilai de jia*). While commenting about the topic, he explained that his ideas are derived from a recent article written by a colleague in the recent edition of *Angle*, the company's own in-house publication on the subject how best to approach the issue of contemporary consumers.

In talking about this, he tells us that the main focus of the article is the idea

that Chinese consumers, especially young people, are a group with diverse interests and that branding strategy cannot be developed on the basis of stereotypes. After the presentation of some focus group findings about which brands consumers think represent the future, the business director on the account asked a question about the evolution of the idea of the “happy family” Mark was talking about, but nobody answers, which he didn’t seem to mind. Not long after the business director’s question, the head creative director asked if a particular slide that has been shown represents a slogan. He is told no.

People keep leaving and returning to the meeting to answer a phone call. These coming and goings have little effect on the discussion. After listening to more of what the planner and account director have to say, the creative director asked another question, this time emphasizing that he has a problems with the theory about the family Mark used. His comments are about women made everyone laugh, but he is serious. He keeps talking, although it isn’t really clear what point he is trying to make. At one point, he turns to me and asks me to give an English word for what I think is the Chinese word *xinfu*, but I’m not really sure if this is what he has said. It could be that he has said “xinku,” meaning “hardship,” but I answer by giving the word “comfortable,” and then “content”. Everyone laughs, including myself, since I’m not really sure if my answer has helped, but then the conversation switches back to the issue of the client’s brand.

At this point, the conversation is mainly between the creative director and the business director. Their conversation is centered on what it is that people really want in their lives, a topic brought up by the assistant creative director on the

account. By 5:30 pm the meeting ends so that everyone can get ready for the client meeting in a few hours.

Second Meeting

It is close to nine by the time the second meeting starts. The client is late in arriving, having been held up at a different meeting elsewhere in the city. Four representatives from Qingsong have come for the meeting—two men and two women. The business director talks first and explains the results of today's earlier meeting to the client. After a few minutes, the business director defers to Mark, who talks about the Qingsong's brand in relation to the fact that China is experiencing the world's fastest social change, and that this has created a very complicated social situation, one which is influencing how Qingsong needs to approach consumers.

At this point, Mark shows the slides from earlier to indicate how Qingsong might position its brand in the market. The main point of discussion—now being carried on by Mark and business director together—is the current match-up between the brand's suitability and desire for it in the market. They pause talking, as though in anticipation of a response/reaction from the client but there is none, so they continue to speak. After listening a while longer and viewing more slides, a male representative from the client speaks. He wears glasses and is himself giving a presentation, but has trouble with his computer and cannot get his presentation to open. Time is given to try and fix the problem. Jasmine tea which has been consumed throughout the meeting so far is refreshed for everyone by a young woman who is in training to take over as the account executive on the account.

He gives up trying the use of a computer and explains some of the ideas and research they have done regarding its products. The issues raised differ quite a bit from Mark's comments, and are focused on "branding activity" and even a bit of a critique over what the account team has said about the brand's scope, saying that what the team has said really doesn't address scope at all. Members of the account team do not respond, and instead sit politely listening and do not interrupt, as was the case when their work was being presented.

Just as in the case of the account team's earlier discussion, the client representative talks about the company's desire to get away from traditional depictions of the family in its advertising, the nature of China's development, which appears to be a major theme in discussions so far. He does all of this mainly because they are concerned about the potential "usage" of its products by consumers. As the presentation continues, the representative talks about the importance of "giving back" to the government for all of the support it has shown them over the years, and that they want to do this through the production of a creative and positive campaign, as the company is looking to become "creative". By now all of the Qingsong's demands (as they currently stand) are on the table.

Mark has begun to speak again, and as he does so, he compares the ideas given by Qingsong's representative with other brand slogan ideas, as earlier in the meeting the team presented an early idea of a slogan for the brand. He puts a slide on the screen which lists the client's brand in relation to concepts currently used by its competitors. Altogether, seven competitors are listed. In response to the slide and the planner's comments, the male client

representative who gave the presentation tells Mark that what they are looking for is a “simple, easily understandable slogan” and uses the slide to help make his point. More slides are shown which deal with the concepts of “family,” “home,” and “life.” A few of the slides are identical to what was presented/discussed at the earlier meeting held by the account team, but one showing the categories regarding the family shown earlier has been modified to include a fourth category called the “modern family” (*xiandai de jia*). This category has been inserted between the “traditional” and “contemporary” families’ categories. It appears that the most important point actually has to do with something planner has said about the recognition of the Chinese family as a “three generation” family. This point signals the end of the meeting. By now it is close to 11pm, and it is clear that everyone is exhausted. The meeting has gone on for over two hours, and is starting to come to a close. I finally leave the meeting at 10:50pm to catch a cab back home.

With Qingsong’s opinions about the strategy now known to the account team more work went into designing the main concept that would be used. A week after the positioning meetings the account team once again convened to discuss the strategy to be used in Qingsong’s account. During this meeting, attention focused primarily on the question of what to make of the concept “3C,” and the best way to make the concept stand out. Where my entry engages this process is in the heat of between Mark, the account planner, and Steven, the account director.

Everyone’s focus is on Qingsong’s “brand personality” today, and Steven and Mark have been debating about how to symbolize the 3C idea. Debate has

focused on what to make of the ideas of comfort and care, two ideas that have come up to stand in for the original 3C concepts. Mark has been having a hard time understanding Steven's meaning, even though Steven has fastened examples of advertisements from other companies, like Apple, to the wall in order to point out that the idea the team has come up with needs to be more concrete.

Mark's opinion is that he thinks that they need to be careful in using the current 3C configuration (creative, cute, care), especially because the idea of cute may not reflect consumer insights. Even though Steven listens to this, he doesn't agree, causing more debate and ultimately leading Mark to ask why are they using the ideas of "comfort and care" and not the combination of "comfort and cute"? "How are we going to get Qingsong's products to stand out?"

In Mark's opinion, all of this is really complicated. "What meaning are we giving to caring?" "What do we have so far?" These questions lead to more discussion between Steven and Mark, causing Mark to say "I think these ideas are too abstract. We need to make them more concrete, get them to say something about consumers nowadays."

Mark then tries to make a point about the origins of creativity, but Steven is not interested and started to talk about Apple's campaign 'Think Different,' about how clear it was in communicating its message. This comment gets Mark a bit upset, because he felt Steven should use a different idea because it still isn't clear to him what Steven is talking about. The two continue to debate

over the creative aspect of the brand. Both keep making a statement, then saying if the other has gotten his meaning. Steven has had the suggestion the different methods of approaching the communication of 3C might be better for them to focus on. To make his point he starts talking about the idea of long-term communication. Mark once again asked what they are trying to accomplish with this discussion, his frustration and tired starting to show. The group has been meeting for close to three hours, and it is still not clear what three C's to use.

If one thing can be taken from this meeting, it is that little headway seemed to be made in terms of what direction the team would ultimately take its thinking about 3C. However, first impressions can be deceiving. As it turned out, the banter surrounding the use of 3C had less to do with direction, and more with fine-tuning. Ultimately, these ideas would manifest themselves in the words “creativity,” “comfort,” and “cool,” but not before a number of disagreements, indicated above, as to what concepts actually best portrayed Qingsong's new brand image. The team had set its approach, which equated to the use of a three C format as the central creative idea of the campaign. This understanding became clear following a meeting just three days later when the entire account team met to talk about the campaign. Following these meetings in the fall, a period of relative quiet at the agency ensued surrounding the account. Reasons for this quiet stemmed from the shift of activity on the account to the client's headquarters and a prolonged period in which the account team awaited word of the reaction the client's CEO to their plan.

Media Matters

The next major activity on Qingsong's campaign occurred in December, at which time members of the team came together to deliberate about the sort of media to be used. By this point in time, the first of the artwork related to the campaign had been completed, and focus now shifted to how to best address communicating the company's new image to consumers. Discussion ranged from the use of newspapers to the internet, but word had come from the client to utilize television, since television still served as one of the most effective modes of communication. The problem, however, was that television was not the medium of choice for for Qingsong's target audience. Therefore, another tactic adopted by the team to indicate Qingsong's brand's difference manifested itself in its selection of a blogger as spokespersons for the brand. Yet even as the team made this decision, complicating the its efforts was a request from Qingsong, to try and structure its position to mimic that of the Mengniu Dairy Company, whose brand of yogurt and milk products had shot to fame in the preceding year, thanks to its sponsorship of a popular variety show called *SuperGirl* and the use of its runner-up in its advertisements.

Patterned on shows like *American Idol*, *SuperGirl* had garnered enormous fame as a program for ordinary teenage girls to showcase their individuality by singing before large audiences famous English and Chinese-language songs. The show was a major hit with the exact market demographic Qingsong hoped to capture with its campaign. But when the team received this news it balked at the request, knowing not only would it not be able to perform the sort of magic Qingsong was asking for, but also knowing adoption of this approach would contradict the creative ethos promoted by the agency.

Knowing SuperGirl-level celebrities to be outside its ability to attract for the campaign, the team instead selected a well-known celebrity blogger, as the brand's spokesperson. The team decided on an individual who had gained prominent notoriety as a blogger thanks to a regular web column chronicling the details of her life. The idea of going with this individual represented an attempt by the account team to capitalize on the growing use of the internet as a public forum in China. Internet use in China has grown at an exponential rate since its introduction at the end of the 20th century, and especially since China's joining of the WTO. A major reason for this growth is the relative ease with which users can express their opinions about any topic without the fear of punishment. But for more than this reason alone, the Internet has constituted an environment which Chinese users have expressed themselves as creative beings and in the process tackling stereotypes of the Chinese self as highly conforming and mimetic. This understanding has been widely reported in news reports, such as in a 2006 article in *The Economist*, which states,

...the internet should not be dismissed as merely an instrument of control for the Communist Party. In the past three years [since 2003], China has seen far more extensive use of the internet and the rapid development of groups that share views online that are by no means always the same as the party's. The numbers of internet-connected computers have more than doubled since the end of 2002, to 45.6m, and internet-users have risen by 75%, to 111m. China now has more internet-users than any country but America, and over half of them have broadband (up from 6.6% at the end of 2002). Users of instant computer-to-computer messaging systems have more than doubled, to 87m. *Blogs—online personal diaries, scarcely heard of three years ago, no number more than 30m...* [emphasis added].

The use of blogging also represented one of the newest channels recognized by marketers as available to them in their efforts to get their advertising messages out to consumers.

Making this move illustrated a form of risk for the team, as the only truly youth-centered attribute associated with this individual was blogging. In terms of media, it was decided that the campaign would air first online, at the popular online site sina.com, knowing that roughly 100% of its target demographic were technophiles, and loyal web users. The idea of making use of the Internet was also extended into its search for a spokesperson. Not just anyone would do, but in accordance with Qingsong's wishes, the individual had to be someone Chinese with the appropriate degree of fame. Numerous candidates were selected, and an equal number rejected. Some were considered too expensive, others schedules did not allow for the team's schedule, and still others were simply not what the team was looking for.

Ultimately, the decision was made to avoid trying to make Qingsong into another Mengniu. In the case of Mengniu, its notoriety as a now-famous brand literally came about as a matter of chance. Although well-known in the northeast region of the county, few outside of the region were familiar with the brand. This reaction was due in part to limited media exposure, but following broadcasts of *SuperGirl*, where Mengniu ads appeared at regular intervals, fans came to know and try the product they associated with one of the folk heroes. The launch of the new campaign began with the staging of a press conference to announce the brand's new look. By this point, it was April, and the team had engaged in the project for over five months. As for Qingsong's re-vamped brand, only time would tell if the team's creative efforts to sway public opinion would prove effective.

Conclusion

I focused on the issue of branding in China in this chapter in order to address why this particular practice was imbued with significance by both advertising professionals and their domestic clients at the time of my fieldwork. By giving attention to the activities and issues surrounding the making of a new corporate brand identity through emphasis on the innovations embedded in its products, my aim has been to extend my analysis of creativity as a tool contributing to the development and modernization of China in the early 21st century. What I believe this study shows is that even though certain notions of how we relate to one another in the world, such as brands, take precedence over others on account of their adoption and subsequent use, what is clear is that actual practice continues to trump these perceptions. I feel that this understanding is made evident through the way Qingsong sought to confront their current marketing woes by turning to branding. Even as the company's representatives set to demonstrating their knowledge of branding and how it contributes to the health of a company, actions related to the development of the advertising for their rebranding campaign showed that it continued to act much in the way as those it viewed itself as different from. At this point in time, debate still rages over the ability of Chinese companies to overcome the gravity of their past and fully modern. But as shown, perhaps what is the problem is not what is enacted to be modern, but what one believes that modernity to be.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSION

When I began my analysis of creativity in this dissertation, I did so in response to what I viewed as its extreme relativity as a concept. I arrived at this conclusion on the basis of my fieldwork experience studying the production of brand advertising in China over a one year period, from early July 2005 to early June 2006. During that time, I had the opportunity to observe and sometimes participate in the strategic planning and use of ideas, known rhetorically as ‘creativity,’ by employees at GLBJ for their local clientele. These interactions served as the basis of my understanding of the growing importance being attached to creativity as a descriptor of social action in China. Because of my proximity to Beijing’s business community, I initially imagined the frequency with which I encountered the term to be a symptom of its members’ own preoccupations. However, this outlook soon changed as I engaged in deeper investigation of the topic. Spurred in this direction by my duties as an intern at the agency, I soon discovered that “being creative” also constituted an objective of China’s communist government’s early-21st century social development agenda.

The importance placed on creativity by the Chinese Communist Party stems from the relationship theorized between the notion and that of innovation; a relationship emphasized in the late capitalist economic doctrine currently relied upon to help China develop. According to this doctrine, the development of society has become dependent on the creation of innovations, which through their circulation by way of distribution and trade contribute to a country’s productivity and growth. And the only way to guarantee such innovativeness is to foster creativity, especially that

which is inherently rooted in the nation's citizens. Being creative in order to be innovative now represents one of the "core pillars" of contemporary Chinese social development policy.

On the surface, the Party's adoption of this strain of thinking about the importance of creativity seems to coincide with arguments made by China's critics that the only way for the country to truly develop and modernize is by totally abandoning socialism as a cultural and political system. Yet such readings of the Party's turn to creativity misunderstand the role the Party has assigned to capitalist principles and mechanisms in Chinese society. When the Party, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, decided to adopt and introduce practices and ideas associated with the operating logic of capitalism to help pull China away from the brink of economic and social collapse, it did so as a measure of *ensuring* the success of socialism as a cultural system. What we have come to know of as economic reforms and their aftermath in China were never intended as a replacement of the social system already in place, but as merely supports to the preexisting structure.

What has made creativity theory attractive to the Party is the seeming generality of the term. In writings describing it as an economic tool (Howkins 2001; Florida 2004), creativity is conceived of as an attribute shared in common by humanity, one present on the basis of people being of the same species—that of "human." But in reality, this envisioning of creativity as an "everyman" trait is the product of the way creativity is understood in the politically democratic capitalist societies of Great Britain and North America. It is in these contexts that creativity has come to be viewed as an essential input of the capitalist mode of production. While complicated, the reason for this view corresponds to the way the cultural subject comes to know of the self under capitalist social conditions. According to one

argument, advanced by James Leach, creativity takes on the “everyman” characteristic because of the way ideas and their ownership are imagined in the cultural West (Leach 2005).

The dissolution of traditional ways of knowing the self following the collapse of church authority and its system of structuring human relationships in 16th century Western Europe, gave rise to a new regime of knowing based on notions of self ownership as a conscious act. Intimately connected to this collapse was the emergence of the capitalist production system. Whereas previously, understandings of creation and the ability to create rest solely on God, new understandings of creativity, and its source, began to emerge as a result of the nature of social conditions required by capitalism. In such a system, the key to existence is the production and selling of goods, a process driven by competition. Unlike the earlier mode of thinking, where the competition animating capitalist behavior would be comprehended as an act, or acting out of the will of God, reformed thinking instead placed this competition squarely in the realm of human action (Weiner 2000; Liep 2001). This shift in understanding how the self is realized was paramount to shaping the modern perception of creativity in the West, because the ideas which comprise creativity and their use as a generative force of production became closely tied to the self-determining and preserving actions of the individual person in society (Weiner 2000).

Extension of this uniquely liberal understanding of creativity to new cultural contexts is due to the spread of capitalism as a way of life via war, conquest, and institutionalized forms of expertise. In the case of China, the agents most responsible for the introduction of this formulation are professional “knowledge workers,” (Drucker 1969; 2003), in particular expatriate, foreign practitioners from the fields of global development and business. These workers have entered China in conjunction

with the goal of helping the Communist Party meet its twin aims of developing Chinese society by borrowing the core modernizing mechanism used in the technologically advanced industrial “West,” and consolidating its position as society’s ruling force. To make these objectives a reality, these workers labor by way of instructing their local counterparts in so-called “modern” forms and styles of practice. In the process of instructing, these workers draw on their familiarity with capitalism and its principles in social contexts more liberal than that found in China. While purportedly this arrangement is exactly what “the Chinese” are calling for, it is not without its problems, a situation illustrated by my discussion of advertising professionals and their clients.

That Chinese people desire “modernity” as a trait of their culture is by now a well-documented fact (Barlow et al. 1997; Lee 1999; Rofel 1999; Yeh et al. 2000; Henry 2008). Equally well-known is their support of the means identified by the country’s political elites to acquire this trait (Chun 2006). Yet even with such consensus in place, the same cannot be said for how those means are understood. Accompanying the acceptance by the Chinese public of the idea of relying on and using (one’s) creativity to become modern are multiple interpretations of the meaning of the term. Many factors contribute to this situation, but especially influential is the degree of reflection exercised by Party officials when seizing on this framework. For the most part, the rendering of creativity officially sanctioned by the Party corresponds to the “everyman” framing noted above. But unofficially, what is also being sanctioned as a dominant understanding of the term is the Anglo-American conceptualization, which is at serious odds with people’s true experiences being creative.

Prior to the current moment, creativity—both the act of being and being in possession of the trait—was viewed negatively in China because of its identification

as a bourgeois value, something antithetical to the classically-mandated socialist system then in operation. But just because open expression and acknowledgement of creativity was looked down upon, such an attitude did not signal an absence of its presence within the system. On the contrary, daily life within China's classical socialist society was undeniably marked by acts, instances, and expressions of creativity, all primarily brought about by the crises induced by the tensions between ideology and practice in the system (Kornai 1990; Verdery 1996). The difference marking this creativity from the sort of creativity that is now sought after, however, was its ad hoc-ness versus its formality. While also highly individual in nature, the creativity drawn upon and exercised under the previous formulation of socialism carried no formal rationalization as an element of social or cultural production. People were creative as a matter of survival, but in a way far less consciously recognized than now.

While many Chinese people take their cues on creativity—being and thinking about it—from the western influences present in China, these newer rationalizations of the concept have not completely replaced what previously existed. Ad hoc creativity continues to make its presence known, especially as individuals and groups attempt to make sense of the demands the social environment now places upon them, and even as the western formulation has taken sway discursively. As I came to learn through my study of branding, ad hoc creativity persists because of insufficient efforts undertaken by both the Party and Chinese practitioners to effectively bridge knowledge gaps that exist for local Chinese in their daily lives, because of changes made to the social system, with clear meanings of the term.

To avoid being seen as western, but instead as an *equal to* the West, China's communist party has borrowed practices and ideas that are Western in origin and mandated their usefulness as though all such things were value-free. Knowing this,

but essentially incapable of challenging the situation if they are to maintain their current status as exemplary models, as well as the economic gains garnered from such a position, foreign-taught practitioners also uphold the idea of creativity being value-free, even as their very thoughts and actions indicate otherwise. Both approaches ultimately do a disservice to the very people they are designed to help, especially because of how they place those seeking creativity in order to be modern in relation to modernity itself.

The argument that the experience of modernity can never occur the same way twice is by now well-understood and frequently recited by scholars across the disciplines of the social sciences and humanities (Gaonkar 2001; Eisenstadt 2000; Rofel 1999). But I resurrect it once more in order to close my commentary on creativity in this dissertation. One of the most curious dimensions of creativity as I encountered it in China was the way its appearance in the thought and action of local people pointed to what I felt was a real sense of modernity, as an instance of the new and/or authentic within or of culture, in contrast to what was being sought (Sakai 1990; Ivy 1995). This dimension became most obvious, ironically, in instances where creativity supposedly did not exist, such as the use of branding to help sell products.

While castigated by the advertising professionals I studied for being “wrong” and “lacking creativity,” the branding of local clients they served did all of the things theorized necessary to make them creative. Local clients, such as Qingsong, often drew on elements found in their surrounding environment to be recombined and integrated into advertisements bearing their name, thus meeting both of the requirements of newness and authenticity. What seemed to be preventing the full recognition of this creativity and the revealing of actual modernity in China, or that which is predicated on actions and behaviors native to the people and place itself, was the strong belief that modernity is external, and must be appropriated to be had.

For Chinese people, the project of modernity is ongoing, and the introduction of the issue of creativity into the scheme of what this state of being should look like, unsurprising. Until the recognition is had, or at least the admission made, that modernity is something emergent from the self, China's search will continue unabated and unfulfilled.

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GLOSSARY

<i>bentu</i>	本土	local
<i>chuantong de jia</i>	传统的家	traditional family
<i>chuangxin</i>	创新	innovation
<i>chuangxinxing guojia</i>	创新型国家	innovation nation
<i>chuangyi</i>	创意	creative
<i>chuangzaoli</i>	创造力	creativity
<i>da qi</i>	大气	big air
<i>danwei</i>	单位	work unit
<i>dangdai de jia</i>	当代的家	contemporary family
<i>fenjian</i>	封建	feudal; feudalism
<i>gaige kaifang</i>	改革开放	“open and reform”
<i>guanggao</i>	广告	advertising
<i>guanxi</i>	关系	relationship/network
<i>hutong</i>	胡同	walled-off traditional alley neighborhoods
<i>jihui</i>	机会	opportunity
<i>kehu</i>	客户	client
<i>liang ge banfa</i>	两个办法	two methods
<i>mama huhu</i>	马马虎虎	mediocre
<i>mama haha</i>	马马哈哈	a punning of <i>mama huhu</i>
<i>pinpai</i>	品牌	brand
<i>rencai</i>	人才	talent
<i>tiancai</i>	天才	genius
<i>shenmei</i>	审美	aesthetics

<i>shi ge wu nian jihua</i>	十个五年机会	Tenth Five-Year Plan
<i>suzhi</i>	素质	quality
<i>weilai de jia</i>	未来的家	family of the future
<i>xinxi</i>	信息	information
<i>xinxihua</i>	信息化	informatization
<i>xingfu jiating</i>	幸福家庭	happy family/ies
<i>yingxiao</i>	营销	marketing
<i>zhishi</i>	知识	knowledge
<i>zhishi chuangxin</i>	知识创新工程	knowledge information
<i>gongcheng</i>		plan